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Moses and Christ in the Wilderness Narrative: Transformation of Religious Traditions in 1 Cor 10

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Abstract: Unlike Islam, Judaism and Christianity, religions in antiquity were non-confessional and lacked moral instructions for worshippers. Patron–client associations seemed to depict gods-worshipper relations in Paul’s time. In this paper, I argue that Paul in 1 Cor 10:1–4 uses both his former religious traditions and those of the first audience, Jews and non-Jews, to convince them about his novel God–Christ patron–covenant theology. Paul abruptly introduced Moses (10:2), spiritual food/drink (10:3–4a) and Christ (10:4b) into the classic Jewish wandering story in the wilderness to delineate his anti-idol rhetoric throughout 1 Cor 10. Paul paradoxically warned the first audience against their idol-worshipping lifestyles by utilising and transforming Jewish Shema worship into a binitarian God–Christ covenantal relation, and idol-worship traditions to the only patron family god of the Christ-follower community. Paul’s rhetorical purpose of (re)introducing the concept of God as Moses’ God and Christ as an anti-idol polemic is a coherent theme throughout 1 Cor 10 and probably throughout 1 Cor 11–14.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 10; idol worship in social lives; Paul’s use of OT; Roman religion; 1 Corinthians 8:6; socio-rhetorical criticism; mutated Shema; comparative religions; Rock Christology



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1. Introduction

In retelling the Exodus and wilderness story of Israel in 1 Cor 10, Paul abruptly, with intention, identifies the Rock and Yahweh in the ancient Exodus story with Christ (10:4, 9). Scholars generally acknowledge that the term ‘Christ’ which exists in 10:4 (ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός) and 10:9 is strange and awkward (Robertson and Plummer 1914, p. 201; Barrett 1968, pp. 222–23; Conzelmann 1975, pp. 166–67; Fee 1987, pp. 448–49; Witherington 1995, pp. 218–19; Hays 1997, p. 161; Horsley 1998, pp. 136–37; Oropeza 2000, p. 105; Fitzmyer 2008, p. 383; Ho 2015, pp. 198–200). E. Earle Ellis aptly observes the awkwardness of placing Christ in the past Exodus event, i.e., Christ’s pre-existence, in 10:4, 9:

Does it, however, place Christ only on the eschatological side of this typology? If so, in 1 Cor 10.9 it should read ‘Neither let us tempt Christ (Χριστόν) as some of them [at the exodus] tempted Yahweh’. But, in fact, the verse reads, ‘Neither let us tempt Christ (Χριστόν) as some of them tempted him’. It . . . places Christ both at the Exodus and in the (present)eschatological reality at Corinth . . .

In 1 Cor. 10.4 . . . in agreement with the Old Testament Paul could, by metonymy, have called the miraculous work of God, that is, the Rock, by the name of God. Surprisingly, he identifies the Rock not with God nor with the Spirit but with Christ. (Ellis 1993, pp. 169–70)¹

Scholars usually appeal to Jewish wisdom or movable well tradition in Mishnah’s allegorical interpretation to demonstrate that Paul’s metaphorical reading of Christ in the Exodus narrative is not uncommon in ancient Judaism (cf. Collins 1995, pp. 162–64; Enns 1996; Thiselton 2000, pp. 727–29; Ageson 2006). This approach seeks to explain the sudden insertion of “Christ” in 1 Cor 10:1–4 from Paul’s inherited Jewish traditions.

Two problems emerge when we explore the retelling of Exodus stories in Jewish literature and rabbinic interpretations.

1.1. Problems of Parallelomania in Appealing to Jewish Wisdom or Moveable Well Traditions

First, the research is susceptible to the fallacy of parallelomania, “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction” (Sandmel 1962, p. 1). Parallelomania may lead to the pitfall that the original concept becomes disguised.

For instance, based on a rabbinic interpretation of symbolic meanings of a ‘movable well’ in the wilderness story in Pseudo-Philo’s *Book of Biblical Antiquities* 10:7, 11:15, 20:8; *Tosephta Sukka* 3.11; and *Targum Onqelos* to Num 21: 16–20 (Ageson 2006, pp. 163–67), James A. Ageson, arguing from texts in DSS (CD-A 6:3–4 and 1Q22 2:8), concludes that “early in the development of this tradition a number of symbols have come together: the rock, well, Torah, digging the well, and wisdom . . . something life-giving—water, wisdom, Torah—flows to the people who need to be nourished and sustained” (Ageson 2006, p. 168). By combining Paul’s statement of Rom 10: 6–8, which indicates Paul’s substitution of Torah with Christ, and Paul’s eucharist theology of Christ’s people drinking from the Lord’s cup, Ageson (2006, pp. 168–70) argues that this forms the rationale of Paul’s metaphorical reading of the Rock as Christ in 1 Cor 10:4.

This argument is commendable for it indicates novel innovation from Paul in his Rock Christology. However, it is subject to scrutiny for blending different symbols in different Jewish texts into a single/common symbolic meaning. In CD-A (Damascus Document) 6:1–6, the term ‘well’ is symbolised as the observance of the Law to counter the three nets of Belial: fornication, wealth and defilement of the temple. ‘Well’ in the context of CD-A 6 is then a symbol of strict observance of the Law which functions against evil temptations, to keep them ‘apart from the sons of the pit . . . to set apart holy portions according to their exact interpretation (CD-A 6: 14, 20)’. It is strange to mix it with the symbol of ‘well’, which functions as moveable life-giving provisions in Jewish texts like Pseudo-Philo’s *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, *Tosephta Sukka* and *Targum Onqelos*. Interpretations of Num 21:28 in CD-A and *Targum Onqelos* witness two different understandings of the function of the Torah. Blending these two different symbolic meanings of the ‘well’ in Jewish texts constitutes the pitfall of disguised replacement of concept.

Appealing to Jewish wisdom traditions encounters a similar critique of parallelomania. By drawing Paul’s Wisdom Christology in 1 Cor 1:30 together with the pre-existing Jewish Wisdom traditions in the Wisdom of Solomon, scholars have explained that Paul may pick up the concept of divine wisdom that nourished and protected Israelites in the wilderness and then applied it to Christ (Thiselton 2000, pp. 728–29). This reasonably explains why Paul identifies Christ with divine wisdom. But why is the material Rock being identified as Christ? Wisdom of Solomon 11:1–11 shows that Wisdom is related to the flinty rock in the wilderness story; the Wisdom, however, is identified as “you” Yahweh, not the flinty rock. Throughout the discourse of Wisdom 11:1–8, Wisdom is identified as Yahweh the gift-giver, while the flinty rock or hard stone (11:4b) was associated with the fountain of an ever-flowing river and abundant water as “gifts” or delivery vessels of the gifts, not the Wisdom or Yahweh. The material rock is not an expression, symbol or identity of the one God. There is no Rock theology in the wisdom of Solomon.

Scholars were at pains to make associations of various isolated texts in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Psalms and different streams of traditions on Exodus materials to explain why the divine wisdom can be identified with the Rock. Again, this approach blends different meanings of the Rock in different Exodus materials texts and ignores its critical different semantic meanings and functions. For instance, in Deut 32:13, the ‘rock’ is regarded as an instrument of God’s provision of oil and honey. In LXX Ps 77:20 and Isa 48:21, however, the subject who provides water and protects Israelites is still considered to be Yahweh; ‘rock’ is regarded as a material object that God calves and breaks down. It does

not match the image of the moving item (Rock following them) and Christ as an active agent in 1 Cor 10: 4 as well as its surrounding contexts.

1.2. Jewish Traditions Overlook the Rhetoric Insertion of Moses in 10:2

Secondly, interpreting Paul's insertion of Christ in 1 Cor 10:4 alongside Jewish texts may overlook another peculiar name in 10:1–4, which Paul intentionally added, i.e., Moses. Defining the first-generation Israelites as being baptised unto Yahweh's prophet Moses is rare and even blasphemous to any variegated Judaisms, both ancient and contemporary with Paul. John the Baptist had baptised Jews in the river Jordan, but it was never done on behalf of a human name. Appealing to Paul's inherited Jewish traditions may target only the isolated text 'The Rock was Christ', but it cannot explain the appearance of (being baptised unto) Moses and Christ in 10:2–4.

1.3. Reading Christians' Experience Backwards Does Not Explain Experience of Their Fathers/Ancestors

In encountering both the strange description of being baptised unto Moses (εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθησαν in 10:2) and the insertion of Christ in 10:4, another common interpretative approach from Pauline scholarship is to appeal to the present religious experience of the first audience as being baptised in the name of Christ. By comparing Paul's usage of baptism in other places of his letter (1 Cor 1:13–17, 12:13 and 15:29), this Christian baptism/sacramental theory interprets 10:2 as Paul's reconfiguration of the ancient Exodus story with present Christ-followers' experience of being baptised unto Jesus Christ. Moses' deliverance of the Hebrews through the Sea of Reeds is interpreted as a prefiguration of Christ's baptism. Richard Hays interprets 1 Cor. 10:1–22 as Paul's call for "a conversion of the imagination—an imaginative projection of their lives into the framework of the Pentateuchal narrative." (Hays 1999, p. 400).²

This Christian baptism/sacrament theory may find evidence from Paul's later statements of taking them as examples/types in 10:11. It is undeniable that Paul is performing a typological reading of the classic Exodus and wilderness story in 1 Cor 10:1–13. Yet, we need to differentiate between type and allegory, as Anthony Thiselton (2000, p. 730) rightly notes:

The major difference between type and allegory is that the former is grounded in history and presupposes corresponding events; the latter is grounded in a linguistic system of signs or semiotic codes and presupposes resonances or parallels between ideas or semiotic meanings.

It is one thing to interpret historical events and figure out correspondence of possible outcomes to first readers. It is another thing to perform an allegorical reading. Christian-backwards reading takes the present first audience's religious experience in Christ as allegorical meanings of the ancient stories of Israelites. The critical drawback of this Christian-backwards reading is that Paul is telling the story of 'our fathers/ancestors οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν' that, in some ways, is difficult to parallel with the present Christian experience. The repeated 'all πάντες' in 10:1–4, without exception, refers to the subject 'our fathers/ancestors οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν' who experienced 'passing through the sea' and 'were under the cloud' (10:1). These unique experiences of 'our fathers/ancestors' are difficult to explain as allegorical meanings of present Christian experience, nor do they project Corinthians' Christian lives into the framework of the Pentateuchal narrative. Paul repeatedly depicts the Exodus and wilderness story of ancient Israelites on his terms. Paul parallels a classic ancient Israelite story with the potential destinies of the present Corinthians yet keeps an equal distance between these two worlds.

Matthew V. Novenson (2017, p. 271) has clarified the critical difference between the Jewish Messiah(s) and the Messiah in present Christianity using an analogy with fasces/fascism:

When, however, we want to understand the fasces as an institution of Republican Rome, we do not start from modern Italian fascism and work backward, because

to do so would be to put things the wrong way around We recognise that fascism, although it owes its etymology to the Roman fasces, is a category of modern political philosophy, not applicable to antiquity except perhaps by analogy This is just how we should—but, currently, generally do not—conceive of messiahs and messianism The ancient term “messiah” is, of course, related etymologically to the very complicated modern construct “messianism”, but we can and should abstain from stipulating our own notions of “messianism in the strict sense” and then wielding them as analytical tools for use with the primary texts.

This fasces/fascism analogy applies not only to the differences between the present Christian faith and Jewish Messiah, but also to the nuanced different semantic meanings between Christian experiences in Roman Corinth and ancient fathers/ancestors’ experience in the wilderness.

Therefore, the diachronic Jewish traditions inherited by Paul and the religious experience of the Corinthian community may not be adequate to explain these two intentional oddities by Paul in rereading the ‘wilderness’ story of Israelites to the first audience, mainly Gentiles. Sudden identification of the Rock in the wilderness as Christ should not be separable from Paul’s juxtaposition of Israelites being baptised into Moses. While meanings in the past and future can be taken as references, they should be critically discerned. The reference of interpreting the text may primarily adhere to the surrounding context of 1 Cor 10 and the life contexts of the first audience.

2. Social Meaning of Idol-Worship Traditions to the First Audience

Instead of taking Second Temple Jewish interpretative traditions of the Exodus story and drawing ‘parallels’, or Christian experiences of the first audience, Greco-Roman religious contexts in which the first audience was brought up may shed light on the rhetorical meanings of Moses and Christ in 10:1–9. After all, Paul primarily discusses idol meals (1 Cor 8:10; 10:28) and other idolatrous practices in the immediate context of 1 Cor 10 (7, 14, 20–21). Thus, we need to explore what idolatry means in the ordinary lives of the first audience.

2.1. Seeking Protection and Favour from Their Patron Gods without Moral Requirement

Recent socio-historical studies of religion in the Roman World clarify the difference between polytheistic religious lives in Paul’s times and present concepts of religion. Unlike Islam, Judaism and Christianity, religions in antiquity were non-confessional, lacked moral instructions and did not call for behavioural changes in worshippers (Beard et al. 1998, pp. 42–43; Orlin 2007, pp. 58–59). Patron–client interactions seemed to depict gods–worshipper relations in Paul’s time. Like any client who can appeal to numerous patrons for their favour and help, people in the Mediterranean world also worshiped numerous gods for protection and favours in different areas of life. A closer investigation of the religious lives in the Mediterranean world inherits variegated religious traditions which connect the gods with the lives of civic people who sought favours and benefits from gods. Non-Jews were religious, and their religious worship signified their routine lives.

Social patron–client relations in one’s social vertical network, the patron with a higher social status while the client with a lower status, paralleled gods–human/social group relations. James Rives (2007, pp. 106–7) has correctly observed the parallels between patron–client social relations and their religious lives:

What is clear enough is that the social dimension of religion in the Roman world was extremely important in its own right People who employed their resources to benefit others were in effect demonstrating their superior status; those whom they benefited then acknowledged their dependent status through a public display of gratitude towards their patrons. This exchange of benefactions and honors between people of unequal social status, known as patronage or euergetism . . . was fundamental to social life in the Roman world.

Afterwards, Rives explains in detail three areas in which gods play the role of patrons to worshippers, namely, civic patron deity (god(s) of a city-state), family patron deity (gods of house-cult) and voluntary association patron deity (gods of the ethnic minority group in a city, patrons of particular professions and finally minority cultic worshippers, in Rives 2007, pp. 108–29). As a person in antiquity held at least civic, family and ethnic identities and other social identities, they needed protection and grace from different deities in their diverse areas of life.

One significant implication of this patron–client social vertical connection is that applying our modern social class concept to analysing ancient Roman society would be a distortion:

The use of “stratum” or, worse, “class” to speak of Greco-Roman antiquity is misleading and anachronistic . . . for Marxist analysis, in terms of their relationship to the means of economic production. But that model of society is foreign to antiquity . . . Nothing suggests that the very large slave populations, free-born urban subelite, or freedmen and freedwomen ever thought of themselves as constituting distinct classes, each with common characteristics and interests. (Kloppenborg 2019, p. 166)

Unlike the caste system in India or social classes in a modern Westernised individualistic society, some people in the Roman world with lower social status could exert more power and influence than a person of higher status, for one’s connection was a significant social capital for one’s power, as John Kloppenborg (2019, p. 167) continues to elaborate:

It does, however, mean that social standing depended on connectivity to sites of social power. The slave who belonged to a wealthy and powerful family was much better off, and had a much higher real social standing, than a freeborn worker or shop owner who was poorly connected . . . And unlike the experience of slaves in the United States, emancipated slaves in the Roman Empire were eager to advertise and maintain their relationship to their former owners, because the connection conferred status. Connectivity mattered.

This implies that religious activity was regarded as a connection to the divine. Gods grant protection and gracious help. Worshippers give honour to the patron deities in return. For the first audience, abandoning idol worship implies sacrificing social capital of connecting to the divine and other powerful neighbours. It entails them being powerless and strangers to their social groups: civic, family and occupation groups.

2.2. Enforcing Line of Demarcation for the Ingroup ‘We’ for One’s Certain Social Groups

The second social meaning of worshipping gods is the differentiation of ingroup members from outsiders. In particular, for the ethnic, cultural or professional minority groups in an urban city, cultic worship in antiquity was an efficient social activity to build up the we-ness in distinction from the dominant groups (Rives 2007, pp. 108–29; Ho 2015, pp. 147–50).

Recent insightful observations from the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) reveal the significance of rituals in religious group identity building. For example, identity-building rituals refer to the performance of singing songs, participating in the drama of rituals and making prayers and sacrifices together to the same gods. In addition, festivals and celebration social activities, like festival prayers, birthdays, weddings or newborn baby celebrations, are inseparable from their thanksgiving to their gods. Those who participated in these thanksgiving rituals built social bonds and solidarity among ingroup members from the outgroup. Common knowledge then developed among participants in the undertaking of rituals:

Rituals . . . are efficacious because they generate common knowledge (for example, about changes in social status). A secret ceremony that no one has had an opportunity to witness or to hear about cannot really ‘make’ a man and a woman a married couple, while a public ceremony manifesting the social agreement that

a couple is man and wife can turn the man and woman into a coupleOne can of course argue that all that is needed is a social agreement as to the efficacy of a wedding ritual, not the common knowledge created by the performance of a collective ritual; but this begs the question why rites of passages, such as weddings, are universally celebrated collectively, not in privacy. (Uro 2016, p. 168)

This implies that ancient cultic worship created common knowledge among the participants, both of their gods and the social bonds between the participants. It is a self-categorising process of building a shared identity and demarcating the line between ingroup ritual participants and outgroup non-participants. In particular, in the rites of passages of life and death or initiation rites of changing status, in which worship of gods was included, liminality, or moments of in and out of time, was created among the worshippers, and they shared the same journey from being naked or nothing to becoming something important, the sense of 'sacredness'. As a result, it created a community consensus on certain acknowledgements and values (Turner 1977, pp. 96–97).

2.3. Honouring Discourse: Honouring Their Fathers/Ancestors; Honouring Others by Honouring the Gods They Worship

The third social function of worshipping gods was giving glory and honour to them. It is most apparent in the domestic cults of the Roman world, in which honouring the guardian god *numina* is the primary function. The head of the household (*paterfamilias*), usually the family's eldest male, played the priest's role in the domestic cult; he represented the whole household in worship. There were at least three domestic shrines in the house. Two standard sets of house gods were *Penates* and *Lares*. *Penates* usually referred to the gods of food provision. The shrine of *Penates* is located in the storeroom as guardian of grains for the food subsistence of the household (Orr 1978, p. 1563). *Lares* refer to gods which protect family members' safety on the roads and wayfaring (Orr 1978, p. 1566).³ The third domestic god was *Genius*, the guardian god of the *paterfamilias*, who is watchful over the family from one generation to another. *Genius* was worshipped on the birthday and the marriage day of the *paterfamilias*. This god was probably the ancestor of the family who was credited for the blessings of giving birth to the *paterfamilias* and the ongoing blessings for his fertility power of giving birth to more children (Orr 1978, p. 1570; Bodel 2008, p. 258). In some houses in antiquity, the *Lares* were associated with the dead ancestors (Bodel 2008, p. 258). The shrines of *Lares* and *Genius* were usually juxtaposed in the house in the act of sacrifice (Bodel 2008, p. 256).

This brief survey of the domestic religions indicates that a common place of worship in the Roman world was probably around the shrines at home. Domestic cults performed similar functions to their worship in the temple. The difference was that family members may have had deeper emotional affiliations with the family gods, for they were brought up worshipping them; some of these gods were even their family ancestors divinised as gods. They believed that these gods granted them safety and gave them reproductive power to procreate the next generation. They demonstrated high or at least sincere honour to the deceased ancestors. Participating in the rites of domestic worship was an important family activity to connect with the roots of their family origins. A domestic cult was a powerful social identity formation regarding family solidarity with each other and their deceased ancestors. Honouring domestic gods served to upbuild family honour.

Taking the religious cultures of the first audience in Roman Corinth seriously, their recognition of Christology introduced by Paul should not be taken for granted. Although Paul may have taught them fundamental doctrines of belief in new lives in Christ, they were brought up and socialised within polytheistic worldviews, which even penetrated their family lives.

Paul elucidated judgment to the first audience in 1 Cor 8:2 for their lack of knowledge on food sacrificed to idols (τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων). They presume they know, but actually they do not know, or they do not know fully but only have a smattering of knowledge, from Paul's judgment. First Corinthians 8:4 may be the half-knowledge they presume they know

as Christ-followers. The rhetoric of Paul's language in 1 Cor 8:5 may echo their former knowledge of gods, that there are many gods and many lords. Paul started with what they thought they knew (before and after they became Christ-followers) and then proceeded to disclose what they did not know starting with 1 Cor 8:6. This religious context may help us better understand the rhetorical purposes of 1 Corinthians to the first audience who had newly exited from their upbringing as gods-worshippers in a religious lifestyle.

3. Socio-Rhetorical Approach: Taking Social Meanings of Idol Worship as Frame of Reference to Figuring out Rhetorical Purposes of Inserting Moses and Christ

In this paper, I argue that, in 10:1–4, Paul formulates a covenant theology of God's people with Jesus Christ through the use of some stories in the Pentateuch and Christ Shema in 1 Cor 8:6. The covenant theology with Jesus Christ develops from 1 Cor 8:4–6 and prepares the Corinthians for applications in various situations, e.g., idol meals, and in particular, domestic idol meals in 1 Cor 10: 27–31. Paul paradoxically uses his and the first audience's inherited religious traditions and addresses them in his rhetorical strategy to arrive at his theology.

3.1. *Moses and Christ Recall Mosaic Law and Christ's Messenger in 1 Cor 9:9*

The name Moses is mentioned only twice throughout 1 Corinthians. Another instance of Moses is in the genitive the 'Law of Moses' in 1 Cor 9:9. First Corinthians 10:2 is the only instance in which the name 'Moses' stands alone (τὸν Μωϋσῆν). Comparing the surrounding literary context of 1 Cor 9:9 with 10:2, there are two significant intratextual parallels between 1 Cor 9:9 in 1 Cor 10:1–4.

First, Paul's interpretation of the Mosaic Law Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor 9:9–11 resonates with his re-interpretation of the Exodus and wilderness story in 1 Cor 10:1–13. In 1 Cor 9:9–11, Paul identifies the animal 'ox' in the Mosaic Law Deuteronomy as a type of 'us': God does not care about the ox but 'us' who preach the gospel (~threshing ἀλοῶντα) to the first audience (~the field). By taking the ox and the field as metaphorical types of the preachers and the gospel audience, Paul comes out with the application that gospel preachers, Paul included, have the right to reap material provisions (τὰ σαρκικὰ θερίσομεν 9:11) from the first audience. Although 'Christ' is not explicitly stated in 1 Cor 9:9, the main character 'ox threshing' parallels people preaching Jesus Christ's gospel. Therefore, Christ and Mosaic Law are juxtaposed in Paul's typological reading of Deut 25:4.

For the present study, we do not tackle the exegetical puzzle of whether it is legitimate for Paul to read his present circumstances into the Pentateuch texts. However, it is sufficient to show that Paul's rhetorical strategy of reading 1 Cor 9:9 is similar to the present discourse in 1 Cor 10: 1–13. Paul identifies those first-generation Israelites out of Egypt as *ancestors* of the Corinthian Christian community (not the Christian community). Their destiny of destruction in history due to various transgressions (10:7–10) was identified as warnings against a plausible final destruction of their descendants, those eschatological people (10:11). Paul takes the destiny of the history of ancient Israelites seriously as a potential future destiny of 'us' as the eschatological people.

Secondly, besides 10:1–4, the contents for Paul's solemn warnings to the first audience of "μηδὲ εἰδωλόατραι γίνεσθε/ πορνεύωμεν/ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν/ γογγύζετε" in 10:7–10 are all retrieved from the Pentateuch narrative: 10:7 quotes Exodus 32:6; 10:8 echoes Num 25:1–9; 10:9 echoes Num 21:4–9 and Deut 6:16; and 10:10 echoes three possible events in Numbers 11 or 16. Like 1 Cor 9:9, Paul relates the contents of Mosaic Law (in Pentateuch) and Christ together. Paul constructs a parallel universe between the Corinthians' spiritual journey in Christ and the narrative world of their ancestors in the wilderness from the contents of the Mosaic Law. In particular, in 10:9, Israelites' sin of tempting YHWH is analogous to Corinthians' temptation of Christ/Lord. Paul inserts the phrase 'baptised into Moses' to reconfigure our ancestors' narrative of wandering in the wilderness. It lays down the ground for Paul to further argue for the severe conse-

quence of the covenant-breaking sins of Christ-followers against Jesus Christ parallel to the covenant-breaking Israelites in the wilderness.

Reading 1 Cor 10:1–4, in particular 10:2, in light of 1 Cor 9:9 and the following solemn warnings for covenant-breaking examples in 10:7–10, Moses in 10:2 should be interpreted as a shorthand reference to Mosaic Law /covenant. Thus it makes sense to state that the ‘ancestors’ of the audience (10:1) were baptised into the covenant of Moses in the cloud and the sea. It refers to the historical events of ancient Israel per se rather than the Christian baptism of the first audience. After the miracle of being delivered through the Sea of Reeds and God’s protection of pillars of clouds in the wilderness, they securely walked to Mount Sinai to become YHWH’s covenant people.

Therefore, one rhetorical purpose of Paul inserting Moses in his retelling story of the wilderness in 1 Cor 10:1–4 is to recall the covenantal theology of their ancestors in the wilderness to the Lord YHWH. The juxtaposition of Moses with Christ hints at how the first audience is to interpret 1 Cor 10:1–4 in the light of 1 Cor 9:8–9: the Law of Moses and its relevance to Christ’s messengers.⁴

3.2. Moses and Christ Recalls Binitarian God–Christ Shema in 1 Cor 8:6

Taking Moses in 10:2 as shorthand of Mosaic Law from 1 Cor 9:9, the first audience may associate 10:2 with another previous instance in 1 Corinthians in which both Christ and the cardinal Mosaic Law *Shema* are mentioned together: 1 Cor 8:6. It recalls the first audience of Paul’s *Shema* confession in 1 Cor 8:6, juxtaposing a human name Jesus with the core Jewish confession of one God—one Lord in Deut 6. Scholars endeavour to find parallels between 1 Cor 8:6 and Proverbs 8, Wisdom of Solomon 9 and Philo’s works to argue that Paul may appeal to Hellenistic Jewish wisdom for his confession to Jesus Christ in 1 Cor 8:6.⁵ Another common notion is that the background of 1 Cor 8:6 may be parallel to the cosmological language of Stoic pantheism expressed in Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.23, Seneca, *Epistula* 65.8 and Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 6.⁶

Wisdom Christology would have been sensible if the second part of 1 Cor 8:6 is formulated as “... and one Lord Messiah, through whom are all things, and we exist through him.” It fits the concept of divine wisdom as the manifestation of Yahweh. The present form of 1 Cor 8:6, however, is odd and incomprehensible to practising Jews accustomed to reciting the *Shema* confession in Deut 6:4 (or the whole part Deut 6:4–9//Deut 11:13–21//Num 15:37–41) as a prayer to the YHWH. In Deut 6:4 or 11:13, both Lord and God refer to the same YHWH. It refers to their exclusive allegiance to YHWH in worship. It defines idolatry or any activity involving idolatrous practice as unfaithful to YHWH. But now Paul juxtaposes this holy prayer to Yahweh with a human name Jesus. Imagine, in present Christian worship, if someone inserts a human name alongside our Heavenly Father in the Lord’s prayer. It would be offensive and even blasphemous to Christians worldwide. In the same manner, it was offensive to practicing Jews in the first century to add the human name Jesus in the *Shema* confession. Thus, it is not surprising that even the influential Wisdom Christology proponent James D. G. Dunn (1989, p. 179) admits that “there is no real parallel to Paul’s formulation here [1 Cor 8: 6]”.

Coining Larry Hurtado’s insightful notion, I contend that it is a ‘mutation’ to designate Paul’s theology of Jesus Christ which, on the one hand, is firmly grounded in Judaism and, on the other hand, outrages Jewish religious people:

There is an important difference between the early Christian conception of the exaltation of Jesus and pagan notions of apotheosis Rather, . . . (1) Jesus is exalted to a particular position, second only to the one God. (2) In this position, he acts by divinely granted authority and as God’s principal agent in the execution of God’s will. (3) He is directly associated with the one God and likened to him in certain ways By “mutation” I mean that earliest Christian devotion was a direct outgrowth from, and indeed a variety of, the ancient Jewish tradition. But at an early stage it exhibited a sudden and significant difference in character from Jewish devotion. (Hurtado 1998, pp. 98–99)

Paul utilised the monotheism of Mosaic Law he inherited to innovate a theology of the human Jew Jesus as Christ by the formulation of a mutated Shema. He placed Jesus Christ in a position comparable with the Father Yahweh. Paul was within Judaism but transformed a fundamental belief of monotheism into a binitarian shape:

The binitarian shape of early Christian devotion did not result from a clumsy crossbreeding of Jewish monotheism and pagan polytheism Rather, in its crucial first stages, we have a significantly new but essentially internal development within the Jewish monotheistic tradition, a mutation within that species of religious devotion. (Hurtado 1998, p. 100)⁷

Reading 10:1–13 in light of the ‘mutated’ Shema in 8:6, where Christ and God are regarded as two persons—one God, the identification of the Rock as Christ becomes a corollary of confession to Jesus Christ in 8:6: “But for us there is . . . one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (δι’ οὗ) are all things, and we exist through him (δι’ αὐτοῦ)”. According to the mutated Shema confession, the spiritual food and drinks Israelites received would be identified as the provision of Jesus Christ.⁸ In 8:6, Jesus Christ has been defined as an agent through whom all creatures receive provisions from the covenant God. Thus, a logical theological interpretation of the provision in the wilderness in light of the mutated Shema in 1 Cor 8:6 is that the divine agency ‘Rock’ is Jesus Christ, through whom the spiritual drinks are gracefully given to their ‘ancestors’. Jesus Christ is the spiritual Rock following them (πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας), indicating that He, like God Yahweh, is a living agent (in motion) who gives all provisions to their ‘ancestors’ throughout the wilderness journey. The food and *water*, not *wine*, in 10:4 may serve as another reminder that Paul’s subject matter is not the Christian experience in the Lord’s Supper. He continues to use his inherited Jewish tradition to infuse a Rock Christology, showing that all provisions, including their ancestors’ water provisions in the wilderness, are from Christ.

Reading 1 Cor 8:5–6 together, where 1 Cor 8:6 begins with ‘But for us’, 1 Cor 8:6 is a statement contrasting with 1 Cor 8:5. Paul continues to insist on the premise of Jewish monotheism that ‘there is no God but one’ (1 Cor 8:4). He is contrasting ‘we’ against the polytheistic creation worldview of ‘many gods and many lords’ in 1 Cor 8:5b. Jesus is not an ‘idol’ of God the Father. He stands in the same category as God the Father. In this binitarian formulation, Jesus is exalted as an object of devotion, yet he is not another god of the polytheistic world. Worshipping the divine Jesus is not idol worship (apotheosis) but a critique against idol worship. The contrast in 1 Cor 8:5–6 forms a solid ground for Paul to proceed with his warnings against idolatry and other cardinal sins that the first audience may commit in 10: 7–10. The destiny of ‘their ancestors’ is a historical event that may become their future destiny (type) if they do not resolutely refrain from idol-worshipping activities and mindsets.

In the present spiritual journey of the Christ-following Corinthians, Jesus Christ provides them richly with tangible gracious gifts of God, in all speech and knowledge (1:4–5). For a Jewish Christian, practising giving thanks to Jesus Christ is not difficult. However, acknowledging Jesus as having equal standing with the one God YHWH in a Shema-formulated confession may be strange to them, even though Jesus was acknowledged as the Messiah and Lord. For a Gentile Christian, it would not be difficult to acknowledge the divine status of Jesus Christ, but it would be quite uncomfortable to give thanks to God and Jesus Christ alone, excluding other patron gods. Therefore, Paul transformed their object of thanksgiving, their benefactor, into the binitarian One God Yahweh–One Lord Jesus Christ alone. Jesus Christ became the only patron of the Corinthian community.⁹

3.3. Using Social Meanings of Idol Worship to Shaping In-Christ Social Identity of the Corinthians

Paradoxically, when Paul rebuked idol worship in the Roman world in 10:1–13, he used common aspects of their former religious practices and values to shape their new social identity in Christ.

Firstly, Rock Christology in 10:5 and 8:6 recalls the social meaning of their former idol worship stated in Section 2.1: gods as patrons.

Secondly, Paul's innovation of the two-persons–one-God performs a similar social function in their idol worship in Section 2.2: demarcating a clear boundary between them and us in 1 Cor 8:5–6. There were many gods and many lords in the world, but for us (ἀλλ' ἡμῶν), we acknowledge only one God–one Lord Jesus Christ as our patron deity. The elements of ensuing repeated 'brother' language in 1 Cor 8:11–13, namely the brother for whom Christ died, sinning against those brothers = sinning against Christ, and in particular 'my brother τὸν ἀδελφόν μου'(13), refer to all Corinthian members from different families, Jews and non-Jews, respectively, but they now form a new family defined by the formula of belief in 8:6 "with a new code of family behaviour" (Wright 1991, p. 130). It is not novel, but a similar social identity boundary demarcation of professional/ethnic minority group associations in urban societies of the Greco-Roman world. The first audience may have been familiar with this in Roman Corinth, where commerce and ethnic minority associations existed around them.

Thirdly, Paul called the Israelites in the Exodus and wilderness story *our* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) in 10:1, ancestors of both Jews and non-Jews of the Corinthian community. This parallel universe of 'our ancestors' recalls their domestic cult practice and honours attitudes to their family gods in Section 2.3, but now their family god is exclusively the Mosaic God–Christ (10:4), the patron god of 'our ancestors' in the new family of Christ-followers. Thus, it is not surprising that Paul mentions house meal sacrifices at the end of 1 Cor 10. Paul articulated this new domestic cult in Christ from the beginning of 1 Cor 10.

3.4. Unique Patron Deity as Antithetical to Many Patron Deities

Paul's new definition of exclusive covenant-faithfulness to Jesus Christ, according to his binitarian formulation, does not override the former patron deity traditions of the first audience but is instead based on it. Paul does not set up an antithesis against a patron deity; instead, he establishes one patron deity as an antithesis against many.

In 10:14–18, after his resolute admonition to 'flee from idolatry', Paul appeals to common sense/practical wisdom (φρονίμοις) of the first audience for their judgment. First, Paul reminds them that partaking at the Lord's table is a covenant partner relation (κοινωνία) legitimated by the blood and body of Christ (v.16). Next, Paul sets up the line of demarcation 'we' in vv.16–17 through the same blood and body of Christ shared in the Eucharist. Then Paul makes parallels of Christ's Eucharist with the altar sacrifices of ancient Israel (18). Paul appeals to the partner-relation building with their patron deity Jesus Christ in participating in Christ's cultic meal, the Eucharist. In their common sense of idol worship, they could participate in their friends' deities' meals, provided that those gods were partners or in a hierarchical relation (greater gods to lesser gods) to their patron deity. However, when the gods were not friends/partners with each other, they should not eat the meals of the enemies of their patron deity lest it would convey betrayal to their patron deity.

Thus, the rhetorical question raised in v.19 brings out the thrust of Paul's rhetoric: what is the relation of other gods with one God–one Lord Jesus Christ? Christ's grace or favour cannot be channelled to worshippers through other gods, for they were not His partners (κοινωνοὺς in 10:20). Putting it the other way around, those sacrifices to idols are sacrifices to demons and not to God (ἀλλ' ὅτι ἃ θύουσιν, δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ 10:20). This is the first time in 1 Corinthians that Paul changes the badge of 'gods' to 'demons' (δαιμονίοις) to identify the object of idol worship. Demons in 10:20 evoke Deut 32:17 LXX to condemn ancient Israelites' idolatrous practices. This creates a negative connotation of idolatry for the participation in other gods-worship meals. They are antithetical to God–Lord worship. The contrast of either–or fellowship of the God–Lord against demons occurs at least three times in 1 Cor 10:20–21, which builds up the either–or contrast. The interchangeability of the terms 'God' and 'Lord' in 10:20–21, on the one hand, reaffirms the binitarian God–Lord Jesus Christ formulation for the object of worship of 'we' established in 1 Cor 8:6 and developed in 9:9, 10:1–4; on the other hand, Paul clarifies that there are no other gods who are partners of their patron deity God–Christ. All other gods are demons who are enemies

of God–Lord Jesus Christ. The unique patron-deity for ‘we’ is then established. From their understanding of fidelity to their patron deity, Paul convinces the first audience that they should no longer participate in other gods’ (=demons) cultic meals.

Thus, Paul utilises both the Jewish tradition of monotheistic covenant faithfulness and the patron deity in the Roman world to set up the line of demarcation of ‘we’ through Jesus Christ alone.

4. Application of God–Christ as the Only Benefactor in the Domestic Dining/Cult in 10:26–31

When the first audience is convinced that they should only recognise Jesus Christ as their patron deity, 1 Cor 10:27–31 is a concrete example of how the Corinthians, living in a polytheistic world, should practice this recognition. Interestingly, Paul does not cite or echo any content of the Pentateuch. He only cites Psalms 23:1 LXX in 10:26 as a principle of eating any food purchased from the market and any food offered at a friend’s home dining table. Nevertheless, when an unbelieving friend of the first audience, the host of a private meal, declares that the meal is offered as a sacrifice (ἱερόθυτόν) to a god,¹⁰ Paul solemnly warns them, “You should not eat μὴ ἐσθίετε!” (10:28).

This is another impractical instruction! Socially speaking, how can one sit at a friend’s table in his home for social dining and then suddenly refuse to eat anything on the table? Nevertheless, the following two rhetorical questions in vv.29–30 show that Paul seriously warns them not to participate in that meal any longer. This is because, once the host declared the social meal as an offering of sacrifice (ἱερόθυτόν), it became a pagan sacrifice to his gods taking place at home. It became an instance of a table sacrifice to the demons and not to God (10:20). Even though it does not occur in the temple, the function of that social meal is the same as giving thanks to the friend’s domestic gods. Therefore, according to the covenant theology of the unique patron God–Christ, Christ-followers should not participate in eating anymore. It is for the unbeliever’s conscience—his faculty to judge right and wrong. This offensive act remains in his conscience, and it is hard for him to forget it. Worshipping human Jesus Christ differs from the worship of apotheosis gods. There is an exclusive allegiance for Christ-worshippers that they shall no longer regard other gods as patrons and objects of sacrifice.

If one continues to participate in the dining but does not thank his friend’s gods, the unbelieving friend will rebuke him according to his conscience of making the sacrificial meal to his patron god (29). In another case, the Corinthian Christ-follower continues to participate and gives thanks either to the friend’s patron gods or to Jesus Christ (30). Then he becomes either a worshipper of demons or is judged by the unbelieving host to be blasphemous against his family gods. Therefore, to let his unbelieving host know that all the blessings and protections are given only by the Lord (10: 26), one should no longer participate in the table sacrificed to gods/demons.

Paul used the common knowledge of the domestic cult honouring family gods to induce this offensive application of the first audience to their unbelieving friends. In their tradition of the domestic cult, stated in Section 2.3, family gods were either ‘their ancestors’ or the gods who granted protection to ‘their ancestors’. In the unbeliever’s house, it was natural for him to declare the meal as that offered in sacrifice for giving thanks to Lares or Genius on birthdays or times of returning home safely. Participating in it became an acknowledgement of worship and connected to the friend’s family gods. It was a piece of knowledge well known to the first audience.

Paul’s resolute no is offensive, but it highlights the distinctiveness of the Christ cult to the unbelieving friend. Paul was shaping their distinctive new social identity in Christ by following the formula of one God–one Lord:

1. Christ-worshippers should give thanks to the only patron, Lord Jesus Christ, of all the world alone (10:26);
2. In eating or drinking, do it to glorify God (10:31)!

The glorifying language (δόξαν θεοῦ), on the one hand, echoes the Lordship of Christ over their whole life, like the master over slave analogy (you were bought with a price) in 1 Cor. 6:20. On the other hand, it resembles their former practice of honouring their family gods for their protection and blessing. However, in the parallel universe of the Exodus and wilderness (10:1), it is still the same Christ who provides spiritual food and drinks to *their ancestors*. Based on Paul's retelling of the Exodus story in 10:1–5, the identification of Moses as Mosaic covenant and Christ as Rock indicates that the first audience, in particular the non-Jewish former worshippers of domestic cults, should only worship their present family patron deity who had given blessings to *their ancestors*. His unbelieving friend's conscience will then learn that Christ-followers can honour only one patron deity in their religious practice, whether in corporate Christian worship or a domestic cult.

Our ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν in 10:1), therefore, should be taken seriously as Paul's rhetoric of redefining their ancestors when the non-Jews of the first audience joined the Christ cult. The rhetorical interpretation from the first audience perspective lies in their new perspective of the revised identity of their family god. As there is only one patron god in their new family in Christ and others are demons/enemies of their patron god, Christ-followers can honour only one God–Christ at their home, in their friend's home, or in any other place.

5. Conclusions

The wilderness narrative in the Pentateuch is a classic story that demonstrates how God richly grants blessings to His covenant people. Yet they were ungrateful to God. Paul constructed a parallel universe by inserting Moses as shorthand for the Mosaic covenant. Based on his formulation of the binitarian God–Christ mutated Shema, Paul further placed Christ as being present in the wilderness story, the Rock in motion. Paul, thus, indoctrinated an exclusive covenantal Rock Christology, which he presented to the Christ-followers in Corinth. Throughout 1 Cor 10, Paul used the Jewish monotheistic tradition and the religious idol-worship tradition that he and the first audience inherited to formulate an exclusive patron–covenant God–Christ Christology. This theology became the foundation for his explicit prohibition against participating in idol meals in any form. Once the meal was inaugurated as representing thanksgiving sacrifices to idols, a Christ-follower should not participate in it, even though it may offend one's friends or authorities. The insertion of Christ in 10:4 is sensible and necessary to invoke their confession: for us, there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and we exist through Him.

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¹ Some ancient Greek texts render 'Lord' or 'God' in 10:9 instead of 'Christ'. But the most ancient textual witness P⁴⁶ renders 'Christ' in 10:9. And throughout 1 Cor 5:1–11:1, the singular term 'Lord' unambiguously refers to Jesus Christ: 5:4–5; 6:11, 13–14, 17; 7:10, 12, 17, 22, 25, 32, 34–35, 39; 8:6; 9:1–2, 5, 14; 10:21–22. The only ambiguous term 'Lord' that refers to Yahweh may be 10:26, where it may be a citation of LXX Ps. 23:1. In the context of serial warnings from 10:7–10, the warnings are addressed to the first audience of Corinthians. It is then fitting to refer to 'Christ' as their object of temptation.

² Gordon Donald Fee (1987, p. 445; 2014, p. 491) makes it more explicit, that "The language 'baptized into Moses' is drawn not from the OT but from Christian baptism, where believers were baptized 'into Christ' (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3)." See also (Schrage 1995, p. 383; Collins 1999, pp. 364–65; Cheung 1999, pp. 144–45; Garland 2003, pp. 449–52; Oropeza 2017, p. 127). For a typical instance of interpreting the insertion of Moses and Christ in 10:1–4, both phrases 'baptized into Moses' and 'the rock was Christ', as a reading of the present Christian experience into ancient Exodus narrative, see (Ciampa and Rosner 2010, pp. 446–51).

- ³ A recent study of domestic cults gives different definitions of these two gods, “one generic and collective (the *Lares*), the other pluralistic and individualized in orientation (the *Penates*)” (Bodel 2008, pp. 248–49).
- ⁴ (Gardner 2018, pp. 426–28) arrives at a similar conclusion to mine in comparing the two communities in covenant terms, Israelites in antiquity and the present Christian one, but by different arguments.
- ⁵ (Horsley 1978, 1980; Ellis 1993, pp. 171–73; Horsley 1998, pp. 119–20) summarises his notion of Wisdom Christology in his previous two papers. For a discussion about Horsely’s notion of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom, see (Wright 1991, pp. 123–25).
- ⁶ See (Thiselton 2000, p. 635, in particular n.139), for a survey of scholarship for the Stoic pantheism as a background of 1 Cor. 8:6 which was traced back to (Norden 1913). Some texts, however, are written later than 1 Corinthians, like Aurelius’ *Meditations* in the second century. In addition, by taking seriously the rhetorical force of 1 Cor 8:4–6, with repeated ‘one’ in vv.4 and 6 and the sharp contrast of one God—one Lord (v.6) against the ‘so-called λεγόμενοι’ many gods (v.5), Stoic pantheism background seems to be more distant than Jewish Shema background. See also Thiselton’s (2000, pp. 635–36) criticism after his survey. David Garland (2003, p. 377) aptly summarises the problem: “Paul uses this confession as the foundation of his argument against the Corinthians’ behavior. The Christological monotheism expressed here is not their justification for their participation in idol feasts”.
- ⁷ See also (Fitzmyer 2008, pp. 343–44) who has also observed the expression of a binitarian pattern of Christianity in 1 Cor 8:6.
- ⁸ Later Hurtado (2016, pp. 68–73) altered his terminology from ‘binitarian’ to ‘dyadic’ for the formulation of this peculiar nature of earliest Christian belief. This change began in his epilogue in (Hurtado 2015, pp. 143–71). Although the terminology has changed, Hurtado contends that there is no precedent or parallel in the wider Jewish tradition in Paul’s time to this theology of dyadic God–Christ. “This is reflected most dramatically in the novel ‘dyadic’ pattern of devotional practice already presumed in Paul’s letters” (Hurtado 2015, p. 172). First Corinthians 8:4–6 is one typical Christian discourse of the unique relation of Jesus to God Yahweh the Father.
- ⁹ I am aware of Larry Hurtado’s contention of tracing the time of mutation to the Jewish Christ-follower community witnessed in Acts 2. See (Hurtado 1998, pp. 99–122, in particular p. 100). Yet, Hurtado came to his notion mainly based on Pauline letters. Thus, although religious experience and reflection on the risen Jesus may account for the exaltation of Jesus as an object of devotion in the corporate worship of the early Christ-follower community (Hurtado 1998, pp. 117–22), I still contend that, according to extant manuscript evidence, formulating a mutated Shema confession by adding human name Jesus (1 Cor 8:6) and constructing a covenant theology of Christ-followers with Jesus Christ by wilderness narrative (1 Cor 10:1–4) should be attributed to Paul as the originator.
- ¹⁰ If ἱερόθυτόν is interpreted as food that has been sacrificed to idols before being sold in the market, or food from a public religious festival being brought home, it is still regarded as the food offered at a friend’s home dining table. Paul’s command of ‘you should eat ἐσθίετε’ in 10:25, 27 would also be applicable to this case. The speech Paul specifies in 10:28a in an unbeliever’s home is the key interpretative reference for the meaning of ἱερόθυτόν: is the food brought home from religious festival, or food offered by the host, conveying a thanksgiving worship ritual to his family gods?

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