

The Worldview of the Apostle Paul

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Paul believed that a human being is a hopelessly sinful creature, and in support of this point of view, referred to Scripture:

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

In a word, the apostle concludes, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10–18,23). But even those who try to keep the Mosaic laws will not be able to fulfill them completely. The laws of Judaism are so complex and numerous that a person of flesh and blood is simply not able to fulfill them properly. If this is the case, then all people are more or less sinful before the law, so “that a man is not justified by observing the law” (Gal. 2:16). Where is the exit? From Paul's point of view, this solution was first found with the coming of Jesus Christ, whose resurrection proved that he was the true Messiah, the Son of God, whose coming was predicted by the biblical prophets. Only sincere faith in Jesus can save a person's soul and not scrupulous observance of the numerous laws of Judaism. Paul writes:

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal. 2:15–16).

The apostle emphasizes that “it was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith” (Rom. 4:13). In a word, after the resurrection of Jesus, it makes no sense to observe the laws and regulations of Judaism because faith in Jesus itself exempts from the requirements of the laws of Moses. This point of view was in sharp contrast to the position of all the disciples of Jesus, who believed Jesus’s resurrection and faith in him did not exempt Jews from observing the laws of Moses. In a completely different category were converted Gentiles, who could be exempted from observing the Judaic laws but even then not from all of them. It is noteworthy that Jesus himself during his earthly life as well as after the resurrection did not exempt his disciples, as well as his people, from observing the laws of Moses. Yes, Jesus was very liberal about obedience to the instructions of the Oral Torah, believing that they came from people, not from God, but he always strictly demanded compliance with the laws of the Written Torah, that is, the legislation of Moses. Paul was certainly right when he claimed that it was impossible to be righteous according to the law. It is not without reason that a psalm of David asks: “Who can discern his errors?” (Psalm 19:12). But if righteousness cannot be achieved by strict compliance with the law, does this mean that the law should be abolished altogether? And is it possible to not comply with the laws of Judaism, which were supported and even strengthened by Christ himself? The very first psalm of the Book of Psalms emphasizes the importance of the religious law for human beings: “Blessed is the one who does

not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:1). Unlike Paul, the disciples of Jesus believed that the observance of the laws of Judaism by Jews could not contradict even the deepest faith in Christ.

Thus, faith in Jesus, according to Paul, was to replace the Judaic laws, whose power was forced and temporary: “Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal. 3: 23). When Paul extended this statement to the Gentiles, he met with no serious opposition from the other apostles—disciples of Christ. But any attempt to attribute the same to the Jews caused complete misunderstanding among the companions of Jesus. Paul's idea was tempting to Gentiles who wanted to become Christians, but it was unacceptable to most Jews. In fact, Paul, on the one hand, and the disciples of Jesus—the apostles Peter, John, and James—on the other, offered completely different interpretations of Christianity. The disciples of Jesus remained faithful to traditional Judaism and tried only to enrich it with the teaching about the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah (Christ). In contrast, Paul preached an actual rejection of Judaism, not only for the Gentiles but also for the Jews themselves. He proposed a new religion based on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. He replaced the teaching of Christ, which was one of the trends of Judaism, with the teaching about Christ that completely abolished the laws of Moses. From all of Judaism, Paul selected for Christians only the God of Israel, Jewish morality based on the Sinai commandments, and the books of the Old Testament (Tanakh).

It did not matter to Paul whether Jesus was born in Bethlehem or Nazareth or whether he was born of the Holy Spirit or of an ordinary man. The main thing for him was that Jesus had the

Holy Spirit in him and was “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Moreover, Paul made the central point of his sermon not so much the teaching of Christ as the fact of his resurrection. Paul wrote in the first epistle to the Corinthians: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:14–15). In another epistle to the Romans, Paul emphasized: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Rom. 8:11).

About two worlds and the fate of man

Paul believed that the spirit of man finds pleasure in the laws of God. “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. . . . So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (Rom 7:22–23,25). According to Paul, the human body obeys the laws of the material world, where, even if limited, the “prince” of this earthly world rules, but the spirit strives to live according to the laws of another, God’s world, which creates an irreconcilable contradiction within each of us. Paul lamented: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Rom. 7:24).

Paul drew attention to the fact that in our material world, when we are placed in a physical body, we are actually removed from the Lord:

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord . . . We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to

please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:6,8–10)

Paul wrote in the second epistle to the Corinthians:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 5:1–5).

The apostle was convinced that in our earthly world, people are doomed to suffering and pain, and only the transition to another, spiritual world, to God, can save us from torment and reward for the hardships endured. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:22–23). In Paul's view, “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). However, the transition to the spiritual world is possible only for those who do not yield to the temptations of the flesh and live according to the spirit:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like (Gal. 5:16–20).

Paul repeatedly warned that those “who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God . . . A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:21,24; 6:7–8). Human beings, according to the apostle, should not be a slave to their own flesh: “We have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” (Rom 8:12–14). In the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that each of the worlds, the material and immaterial, has its own spirit. “But we have not received the spirit of this world, but the Spirit from God, that we might know what is given us from God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

Paul warned his flock that the material world is full of evil and injustice. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:12–13). The apostle believed that evil has so flooded the earthly

world that it is impossible to avoid any contact with it. In this regard, his words from the first epistle to the Corinthians are very remarkable: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world” (1 Cor. 5:9–10).

About the imminent end of the material world

Like the disciples of Jesus, as well as all the first Christians, Paul was an apocalyptic: He believed in the imminent end of our earthly world. Speaking about its perishable and transient nature, he reminded: “The time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:29–31). There are two versions of the signs of the approaching end of the world in the Pauline epistles. According to one of them, set forth in the first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle writes the following: “About times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (1 Thess. 5:1–3). This version fully corresponds to what Jesus said about the imminent end of our earthly world. Another version can be found in the second epistle to Timothy, Paul’s assistant and associate. Here the apostle warns that “there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:1–5). The same idea is further developed in

Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians, in which the apostle warns the Church not to give in to false rumors about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thess. 2:2). In this letter, Paul expresses the idea that before the end of the world and the coming of Jesus, some global social cataclysm must occur, which will lead to the power of the evil force, and the son of the devil, posing as a messenger of God, will stand at the head of everything, including the Temple. "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3–4). Paul warns that the coming of Satan's messenger will be accompanied by "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" and the deceived people will believe the lie. "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). According to Paul, "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way" (2 Thess. 2:5,7). The apostle does not reveal this in his epistle, but refers to the fact that he spoke about it when he preached in Thessalonica: "Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time" (2 Thess.2:5–6). This second version of Paul about the signs of the end of our world is in tune with what John the Evangelist writes in his Revelation and what many Christians believed in at the end of the first and second centuries CE. And this is not accidental, because according to most biblical

scholars, both epistles 2 Timothy and 2 Thessalonians were written not by Paul himself but by his associates after the apostle's death. Therefore, if we want to know Paul's true view about the end of the world, we should accept the first version, which is set out in 1 Thessalonians, where no one doubts Paul's authorship.

Thus, Paul, being sure of the imminent end of the world, did not know its time or its signs, but neither did the disciples of Jesus. However, what to say about the apostles, if Jesus himself admitted that only the Father knows the time of the end of our world, and even he, the Son of Man, does not.

About the Resurrection

What awaits a person after death? Paul was sure that those who live according to the spirit and not according to the flesh will not die but only change the form of their existence—from material to immaterial. The apostle explained to the Corinthians: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed . . . For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:50–51,53). In another epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle pursues the same thought further: “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thess. 4:13–14). Paul, who came from the Pharisees, fully shared with them the belief in the immortality of souls, and he brought the same idea to Christianity. As for the physical resurrection of the dead after the coming of the Messiah, which was also believed by many Pharisees, from the few epistles where Paul's authorship is not disputed, it is difficult to form his true opinion. It is known that at the trial of the Sanhedrin, Paul said: “My brothers, I am a

Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6). It is difficult to say what the apostle meant by the resurrection of the dead. It cannot be excluded that he deliberately pushed his judges against each other, knowing that some of them were Pharisees who believed in the resurrection of the dead and others were Sadducees who completely denied the possibility of such a thing.

On nonresistance to evil

Paul followed the teachings of Jesus—not to resist evil—and in his epistles he wrote, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil” (Rom. 12:14,17). However, he somewhat changed this principle of Jesus, believing that the right to revenge for evil belongs not to man but to God. He urged his flock in Rome: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head” (Rom 12:19). Paul proposed not merely passive nonresistance to evil but a struggle against evil with the help of good, which should lead to vengeance on the part of the Lord himself. He wrote: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). In this approach, there is some compromise between Old Testament morality and the teachings of Jesus. As is well known, the Old Testament principle—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—demanded adequate retribution to the offender, while Jesus excluded any revenge at all and was ready to pray for the offender so that he would not suffer punishment from God. Paul offered to avenge evil with good, leaving to the Lord the choice of punishment for the offender.

On the special role of the Jewish people in Christianity

Paul loved his people very much and was ready to make any sacrifice for their sake. He confessed: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel." According to the apostle: "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen" (Rom. 9:3–5). Emphasizing the God-chosen Jews and their special purpose, Paul was upset that not everything happens as it should have been according to the Scriptures. And the most unexpected thing was that the Jewish people in the mass were in no hurry to accept Jesus, the Messiah who was sent to save Israel. Trying to understand this, Paul came to an important conclusion: "It is not as though God's word had failed," but that the true Israelites are not all those who call themselves by this name. "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children . . . In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (Rom. 9:6–7). The true sons of Israel, according to Paul, are not just those who fulfill the commandments of God, but those whom the Lord himself considers to be such. And it is useless for a person to try to understand this, and even more so to resist his will. "But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?" (Rom. 9:20–21). So, not every son of Israel is the chosen one of God, but only the one who was chosen by the Lord himself. Paul recalls the words of Scripture: "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau," and the fact that the elder (Esau) was enslaved to the younger (Jacob). But they are both twin sons of the same mother, Rebekah, and the same father, the patriarch

Isaac; they are both grandsons of Abraham. Among many examples, how different can be the fate of the sons of the Jewish people, Paul quoted from Isaiah's prophecy: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Rom. 9:27). This means that God's choice does not apply to the entire Jewish people, but only to a part of them, and a smaller part, and only the Lord knows who and why is among these chosen ones. Paul notes bitterly: "The Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom 9:30–32). However, as the apostle reminds us, "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). But for God "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14). Here Paul comes to the most painful question for him: why most Jews have not yet accepted their own Jewish Messiah? Trying to find an explanation for this, Paul quotes the words of the prophet Isaiah, who, in conveying to Israel the will of the Lord, said: "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people," but "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me" (Rom. 10:20–21). Again Paul asks himself in dismay: "Did God reject his people?" And he answers himself: "By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:1–2). The apostle draws attention to the passage of the Scripture where the prophet Elijah complained to the Lord about his people: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me." Paul finds the Lord's answer to be very significant: "I have reserved for myself seven

thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” The apostle asserts that both in the past and present, and in all subsequent times, the Lord will surely preserve the remnant of his chosen people. These few will be chosen "by grace" and "not by works." As for the rest, their fate is unenviable, because “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day” (Rom. 11:3–8). But did most of Paul's brethren “stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?” And to this question the apostle answers in the negative: “Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!” (Rom. 11:11–12). Paul sees the will of the Lord in the fact that the majority of the Jewish people did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah, because this forced Jewish Christians to preach about Christ to other nations, and this could lead the pagan peoples to the true God.

At the same time, Paul warns Gentile converts, as well as all non-Jewish Christians in general, that the non-recognition of Jesus by the majority of Jews does not mean that they thereby deprive themselves of the status of a God-chosen people, that the Lord's covenant with them loses its validity. The Jews, “as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29). Paul considers it necessary to warn Christians not to try to rise above the Jews who did not recognize Jesus, because the roots of Christianity are in Judaism, and it was the Jews who brought the gospel of Christ to other nations. The apostle reminds: “If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches” (Rom 11:16). Paul writes to overzealous Christians and explains: “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root,

but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either” (Rom. 11:17–21).

Paul does not want to leave Christians in the dark about the secret reason why Jews do not believe in Christ: Their rejection of Jesus is caused by the Lord himself only so that they might spread the knowledge of the true God among all the peoples of the earth. “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way, all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25). In his opinion, one day all Jews will believe in their Messiah—Jesus. “After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!” (Rom. 11:24).

In singling out the Jews, Paul pointed out that they, as a people chosen for a great spiritual mission, always have a greater responsibility than others. Great honor in the good and great guilt for the bad. “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 2:9–10). Paul asks the question: “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” And he answers himself: “Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God” (Rom. 3:1–2). The apostle considers it necessary to support his opinion with the prophecy of Isaiah: “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope” (Rom. 15:12). Paul paid attention not only to the special role of Jews in Christianity but also to the different attitudes of Jesus himself toward the Jews and the Gentiles. “For I tell you that Christ has become a

servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed, and moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom. 15:8–9).

At the same time, Paul emphasized that through faith in Jesus, the differences between Jews and Gentiles, and most importantly the privilege of being a Jew, are eliminated. "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (Rom. 3:29–30).

About circumcision

From Paul's point of view, it is not necessary for Gentiles who choose to become Christians to be circumcised, and for Jews who believe in Jesus, it is not necessary to abandon this traditional rite because circumcision itself does not change anything. "Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (Rom. 2:25–29). Paul left the question of circumcision to the discretion of the person himself. "Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called?

He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Cor. 7:17–19). The apostle emphasizes that "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6). To confirm his words, Paul turns to the biblical story: "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them" (Rom 4:9–11). If you have accepted Jesus, "in him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands" (Col. 2:11).

About kashrut (dietary laws)

Paul believed that new Christians who are from among the Gentiles should not be forced to follow Judaic dietary laws (kashrut), although Jewish Christians themselves could continue to observe them. Addressing first of all his fellow Jews, who were then the majority in Christian communities, the apostle urged: "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food . . . For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:20,17). "Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it" (1 Cor. 10:25–28). From Paul's point of view, Jews who accepted Jesus were free to choose whether to observe kashrut or not. But the same right was given to Gentiles newly converted to Christianity: They were free to adhere to Jewish dietary laws or to follow their own national traditions and habits in choosing food. However, none

of the members of the Christian communities were to dictate to others what was permissible to eat and what was not. Paul instructed: “The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them . . . So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” (Rom. 14:3,12). At the same time, the apostle considered it necessary for new Christians from the Gentiles to observe certain Jewish prohibitions in food, such as "idolatrous" meat and carrion.

About marriage

Paul saw marriage as a necessary evil to avoid fornication. The apostle believed that in principle “it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:1–2).

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Cor. 7:8–11)

To Christian communities, the apostle offered his view of marriage: “Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this” (1 Cor. 7:27–28). Paul explained his preference for celibacy as follows:

An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:32–34)

Convinced that the end of our world was not far off, Paul regarded marriage as a means to prevent something even worse—fornication. “The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord” (1 Cor.6:13). Paul explained the need to put an end to fornication and the requirement of the indissolubility of marriage by following: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor. 6:19). In his opinion, for those who have chosen to serve the Lord, it would be better to remain unmarried.

Paul's main idea and its consequences

While the Council of Jerusalem (49 CE ?) freed former pagans from having to fulfill most Judaic laws, notably the law mandating circumcision, nothing of the sort was done for Jewish Christians. On the contrary, the apostles—Jesus's disciples—believed that the Jews who joined Christ should continue to fully observe all the Judaic laws, traditions, and rituals. But how is it possible to bring together, as one Christian community, those who zealously observed the laws of circumcision, the Sabbath, and Kosher and ceremoniously observed Jewish holidays and those who blatantly ignored the same laws? How could a Jew who believed in Jesus and a newly

converted Hellene be united? To do this, the apostle Paul took a revolutionary step—one which the apostles Peter, James, and John never accepted. By his authority, Paul freed all pagans who wanted to accept Jesus from the observance of absolutely all Judaic laws. Of all Judaism, he left for the Gentile converts only the one God of Israel, the Jewish moral that was founded on the Ten Commandments received by Moses on Mt. Sinai, and the Sacred Scripture (the Old Testament). But Paul went further: he began to claim that after the resurrection of Jesus, which proved that the latter was the true and long-awaited Jewish Messiah, there would be a kind of messianic period that will last till the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. During this fairly short—so the apostle thought—period, it was not necessary for former pagans to observe the Judaic laws; moreover, he believed the Jews themselves did not have to either. In Paul's view, the Mosaic laws were essential, but only before the resurrection of Christ. The apostle focused primarily not on what Jesus preached but on his resurrection. After all, Jesus's preaching was a part of the same Jewish morality that Paul had already brought to Christianity. Jesus's resurrection was the event that would radically change the fate of all humanity. In all his epistles, at least in those whose authenticity is not disputed, the apostle writes almost nothing about Jesus's life and preaching. This is no coincidence. Paul talks about what is most important for him—that is, the meaning of Jesus's resurrection for our world. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17). This was no longer religious reform; it was a real revolution in Judaism that made it possible to "Judaize" millions of Gentiles. But it now became very difficult for Jews to enter the new Judaism of Paul; to do so, they would need to give up all the features that made them Jews. Notably, Jesus's disciples, including the apostle Peter, could not do this. Thus, an unbridgeable chasm emerged between the Jewish Christians, which included all of Jesus's disciples and the Gentiles who were led by Paul to the God of Israel.

Paul's idea—to bring the masses of pagans to his simplified Jewish monotheism—did not appear by chance and by no means groundlessly. The Greco-Roman world of the first century CE was ready to accept it. The formation of the huge Roman Empire, which united within its borders many peoples who differed from one another in terms of culture and development, required a religion that would be supranational in its character. The absolute power of the emperor, a single army, and common laws for the entire empire demanded the same degree of unification and centralization in religion. The existence of numerous God-fearers among the educated Romans and Greeks testified to people's growing dissatisfaction with pagan gods and cults. And so, it was not only the political interests of the enormous empire but also the spiritual and intellectual needs of the people of that time that motivated them to turn their attention to Jewish monotheism. However, monotheism in Jewish national dress, under the burden of the difficult-to-fulfill Mosaic laws, did not have any chance of being accepted as the state religion of the entire empire. A new religion was needed—one that would rely on the idea of Jewish monotheism but would not carry any Jewish national and historical particularities. Objectively, the Greco-Roman world needed a reformer who could adapt the monotheism of the Judeans for the state and spiritual needs of the ancient world's greatest empire. And this reformer appeared. It was Paul, a man who belonged at once to two worlds—the Hellenistic and the Judean. Admittedly, there were many such people who belonged to both cultures among the Jews of that time. But Paul proved to be the one who could find the ideological justification to cut from Judaism exactly as much as was required for the Roman Empire's pagan masses. The resurrection of the Judean Messiah became the link with the help of which Paul connected Jewish monotheism to the culture of the Greco-Roman world. If Paul had not accomplished this, then it would have been done by some other Hellenized Jew who had joined Jesus's followers, such as Apollos, a Jewish religious scholar from Alexandria.

If Paul had not insisted on renouncing the Judaic laws, then his preaching of Jesus as the Messiah might have been accepted with time by the majority of Jewish people. However, in that case, only the Jews would have professed Christianity, and this religion would not have spread outside the Judean communities. But the apostle, for the sake of the Gentiles' convenience, rejected all Judaic rituals, traditions, and customs, focusing his attention on the preaching of the one God and Jesus as being the Messiah (Christ) of not only the Jewish people but of all peoples in the world. This universal, supranational idea, deprived of any Judaic features, was welcomed by the Gentiles but was unattractive to the Jews. The latter preferred that this familiar conception of the God of Israel and the Messiah be "packaged" with the just as usual Judaic laws and customs. This was also supported by the disciples of Jesus. But it was precisely this circumstance that made Judaism, in Paul's opinion, a purely national religion. The apostle, having removed everything national from Judaism, made it a universal world religion—Christianity.

There is no need to mention the enormous and positive influence that Christianity has had on the entire European civilization, which inspires in so many people feelings of gratitude and appreciation for Paul. However, Paul's brethren experienced the consequences of his revolutionary idea very differently. While the apostles lived, the Jews retained their privileged position in Christian communities. Furthermore, until the end of the first century CE, the Jews comprised the majority of these communities. But as time went on, former pagans began to prevail in terms of numbers among the Christians, and with the death of the last apostle, the Jews lost their dominant role in Christianity. Already in the first half of the second century, Gentiles replaced the Jews in the leadership of the Christian communities and took revenge for their prior humiliations on the Jews: In lieu of the spirit of reverence for the first monotheistic people in the world, there appeared a reverse tendency—enmity toward the Jews. To antisemitism, widespread among the Hellenes, the new

Christian leaders added a new argument: the accusation of crucifying Jesus. But to make this reasoning more convincing, they had to edit the gospels. The copyists, with full consent of the leaders of their communities, added to the gospels anti-Jewish statements that changed the spirit and word of the original texts. Moreover, it was at this time, in the second century, that the Apocrypha appeared, in which the antisemitic sentiments of former pagans show more fully. However, since the writers of these Apocrypha never knew Christ and his apostles and did not have the slightest idea about Judean life in the time of Jesus, their forged works were rejected by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.

The change in composition of Christian communities in favor of the Gentiles led to the appearance of yet another serious problem. The newly converted pagans brought to Christianity many heathen customs and views that called monotheism into question. Unlike the Jews, who came to the idea of monotheism through painful struggle against pagan cults over the course of many centuries, the Greeks, Romans, and Syrians were often unable to stay grounded in monotheism and fell into various heresies, which were, in reality, veiled forms of paganism. One of the earliest of these heresies was the Gnosticism of the Greek Marcion, which was a bizarre mix of polytheism and anti-Judaism. The apostle Paul foresaw a similar problem, and in his farewell speech to the leaders of the newly formed churches, he admitted with sadness: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30). Unfortunately, Paul's fears came true. Beginning in the second century, a strange picture emerged: the one God of Israel and his Messiah, the Jewish apostles and Mary, mother of Jesus, turned into objects of worship and veneration for the Gentiles, who, in their turn, began to persecute the people of this God and this Messiah, the descendants of the apostles and Jesus's mother.