

Dialectic of ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in Galatians

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Abstract

This article investigates the dialectic between the concept of seeing the Form (εἶδος) of Eros (ἔρωσ), which is equivalent to knowing the truth (ἀλήθεια), and the metaphoric expression of liberation (λύσις) in Plato's Dialogues. Then it argues that the close connection between ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in Galatians reflects a similar philosophical principle as that of Plato. This recognition is exegetically applied to Galatians to formulate a new interpretive pattern of the distinction between the constant and the variables in Paul's soteriology.

Keywords: truth, freedom, covenantal nomism, Galatians, salvation

One of the significant conceptual frameworks of Galatians is the dynamic interplay of the two closely related concepts, ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία. Neither ἀλήθεια nor ἐλευθερία has traditionally been regarded as a key term in Paul's theology. These terms do not indeed appear in the Pauline corpus as frequently as the other better known theological terms such as δικαιοσύνη or πίστις.¹ However, in Galatians, if not elsewhere, Paul uses these terms ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in key strategic places to the effect that they function as a set of significant conceptual words that gives a unique character to the theological outlook of the epistle, even though the relationship between the two is only implicitly suggested rather than explicitly stated.²

¹ In the seven undisputed letters of Paul, ἀλήθεια appears 19 times (Rom 1.18, 25, 2.8, 20, 3.7, 9.1, 15.8; 1 Cor 5.8, 13.6; 2 Cor 4.2, 6.7, 7.14, 11.10, 12.6, 13.8; Gal 2.5, 14, 5.7; Phil 1.18), and ἐλευθερία appears 6 times (Rom 8.21; 1 Cor 10.29; 2 Cor 3.17; Gal 2.4, 5.1, 13).

² The significance of the word *freedom* in Galatians has been recognized by a number of scholars. For example, Longenecker (1990, p. 51) says freedom is a major theme of Galatians. Dunn (1993, p. 98). Here in the concluding part of the section on Paul's "own theology" (64–100), Dunn says, "The word which Paul chooses to round off the main section of his argument is significant – freedom! It was the word he had chosen earlier to

1 ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in Plato's *Dialogues*

In order to explicate a potentially meaningful range of connotations and denotations of these two words ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in Galatians I will provide here a brief discussion of the interplay between these two concepts in some of the widely known and highly influential Dialogues of Plato. In the so-called Myth of Er in the last book of *The Republic*, Plato describes a post-mortem journey of the souls. After the heavenly rewards and underworldly punishments meted out by the divine judgment, each of the souls gathered there chooses the kind of life in their next cycle of transmigration (μετεμψύχωσις). Then, after passing beneath the Throne of Necessity (ὕπὸ τὸν τῆς ἀνάγκης ἰέναι θρόνον), the souls are taken to a place called the Meadow of Oblivion (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδῖον), in which they are encamped by the River of Forgetfulness (παρὰ τὸν Ἀμέλητα ποταμόν). There they are required to drink of the water from the river. As they drink, they forget (ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι) everything they have known in their previous cycle of incarnation as well as what they have seen during their post-mortem journey (Plato, *The Republic*, 621a). Then, in the next cycle of the metempsychosis, the soul is incarnated into the form of life it has chosen for itself with this *forgetfulness* (λήθη). However, the knowledge is not completely forgotten but it is recoverable through reminiscence/recollection (ἀνάμνησις). In fact, according to the Platonic Socrates in *The Meno*, all we inquire and learn is entirely reminiscence/recollection (τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν, Plato, *The Meno*, 81d). This is why in Greek vocabulary the noun truth (ἀλήθεια) is a compound word consisting of the α-στερητικόν (α-privativum) and the stem of λήθη (forgetfulness). That is, truth (ἀλήθεια) is a matter of re-gaining the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) by negating/undoing (α-) the forgetfulness (λήθη) through recollection (ἀνάμνησις). In *The Phaedo*, Plato develops this theory of recollection further and he has his main character Socrates say that in order to know anything correctly one must be released from oneself (i.e. one's body) and that one must contemplate the objects through (the eye of) the soul itself (εἰ μέλλομέν ποτε καθαρῶς τι εἶσεσθαι, ἀπαλλακτέον αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ θεατέον αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα, Plato, *The Phaedo*, 66d–e).

summarize the truth of the gospel as experienced by the Galatians (2.4–5)." Witherington III (1998, p. 137), "the freedom which we have in Jesus Christ. This phrase in some ways could be said to be the theme of this entire act of persuasion."

In the Platonic epistemology, which is intimated in *The Phaedo*, the object of the true knowledge is the Form (εἶδος) of the being itself (αὐτὴ ἢ οὐσία), such as αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον (equality itself; absolute equality) or αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν (beauty itself/absolute beauty), which always remains the same (ὡσαύτως αἰεὶ ἔχει κατὰ ταῦτα), rather than individual manifestations of it (σκιαί), which keep changing (Plato, *The Phaedo*, 78d). The differences between these two types of existence as two different domains of epistemology are further elaborated in *The Timaeus*. In the introductory part of the dialogue, Timaeus asks a question that is foundational to Plato's philosophical system, τί τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν αἰεὶ ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε (What is that which *is* always and has no beginning? And what is that which always comes into being and never *is*?), Plato, *The Timaeus*, 27d–28a). This fundamental distinction between τὸ ὄν (what *is*) and τὸ γιγνόμενον (what *comes into being*) seems to have been influenced by Heraclitus, who is quoted to have said, “πάντα ῥεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει (Everything flows and nothing remains),” as Plato himself has his main speaker Socrates make a reference to the Heraclitean doctrine of flux in *The Cratylus*.³ According to Aristotle, this distinction between τὸ ὄν and τὸ γιγνόμενον and, more importantly, the idea that true knowledge is possible only for the former are maintained throughout the entire Platonic system.⁴

In the famous speech of Socrates that refers to the instructions by Diotima of Mantinea in *The Symposium*, Plato describes the process of a philosopher's intellectual journey in pursuit of the true knowledge of Eros through the analogy of climbing up a ladder from the bottom to the top rung.⁵ When the philosopher has reached the top rung of the ladder, he will suddenly “see” (κατόψεται) the vision of something marvelous, which is beautiful in nature (τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν

³ Plato, *The Cratylus*, 402a, λέγει πού Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης (Heraclitus says that all things move and nothing remains the same, and analogizing all existing things to the flow of a river, he says that you cannot step twice into the same stream; translation mine).

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 987a, ἐκ νέου τε γὰρ συνήθης γενόμενος πρῶτον Κρατύλῳ καὶ ταῖς Ἡρακλειτείαις δόξαις, ὡς ἀπάντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν αἰεὶ ῥεόντων καὶ ἐπιστήμης περὶ αὐτῶν οὐκ οὔσης, ταῦτα μὲν καὶ ὕστερον οὕτως ὑπέλαβεν (In his youth Plato first became acquainted with Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrines—that all the sensible things always flow and that there is no real knowledge of them—and he still held these doctrines in the same manner later in his life). Scholars have noted that in the later *Dialogues* of Plato there are implicit criticisms and minor modifications of this doctrine, but the majority scholarly opinion is that in the course of the entire system of Plato's *Dialogues* this distinction is upheld in spite of a few passages that show a certain degree of discrepancies. For this aspect of Plato's thoughts see Bolton (1975, pp. 66–95).

⁵ Plato, *The Symposium*, 201d – 212c (The analogy of the ladder is in 210a–212b.)

φύσιν καλόν).⁶ Then, when the philosopher, through this vision, comes to know the true essence of the beauty itself (καὶ γνῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἔστι καλόν), he ultimately becomes friends with the deities (θεοφιλῆς γενέσθαι) and achieves the status of being immortal (ἀθάνατος, Plato, *The Symposium*, 212a–b). These last remarks by Diotima, which are elliptical and highly symbolic, imply that the philosopher standing on the top rung of the ladder would then be liberated from the ongoing cycles of regeneration as a mortal being (μετεμψύχως).⁷

This critical link between *knowing the truth* and *being liberated* is even more clearly articulated in the Allegory of the Cave in the seventh book of *The Republic* (Plato, *The Republic*, 514a–517a). In this parabolic illustration for his theory of the Form, Plato depicts the education of the philosopher as a process of *liberation* (λύσις) by knowing the truth.⁸ The state of being chained with fetters on the neck and the legs (ἐν δεσμοῖς καὶ τὰ σκέλη καὶ τοὺς ἀγκύνας) of the prisoners in the cave symbolizes the servile status of a person in ignorance. Liberation (λύσις) begins to happen as one of them is released from the fetters and is led to face the light from the fire behind for the first time and then dragged up to start an ascent (ἀνάβασις) to the opening of the cave, until he is able to see the heavenly bodies, especially, the sun itself: τελευταῖον δὴ οἶμαι τὸν ἥλιον, οὐκ ἐν ὕδασι οὐδ’ ἐν ἀλλοτρῖα ἔδρα φαντάσματα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν καθ’ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρα δύναιτ’ ἄν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν (Finally, I think, he is able to see the sun itself and contemplates what it really is, not by reflections in waters or apparitions of it in another setting, but in and of itself in its own place, Plato, *The Republic*, 516b). This depiction of seeing the sun itself in *The Republic* is remarkably similar to the language of “knowing the truth” in *The Phaedo* and *The Timaeus*, which is mentioned earlier in this

⁶ Plato, *The Symposium*, 210e. The verb used in this passage is *κατόψομαι*. In *The Gorgias*, 523e, a different verb *θεωρέω* is used to express the notion of “*αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν θεωροῦντα* (seeing the soul itself through the soul itself)” This verb *θεωρέω* is a more typical term for Plato for the notion of contemplating the Form to gain the true knowledge of something. See Nightingale, (2009, pp. 3–4).

⁷ The meaning of these highly symbolic and metaphorical expressions remains permanently ambiguous primarily because Plato himself does not elaborate on it. In this article I opt for the more mythical interpretation that takes the literal meaning of Plato’s vocabulary seriously. In contrast, a more existential interpretation is given by Lear (2006, pp. 96–123), especially, 119–120. See also Adluri (2014, pp. 3–32). Here Adluri discusses the notion of salvation in the *Republic* focusing on the language of the enlightened soul passing through the River of Forgetfulness without drinking the water and thus maintaining the true knowledge that it gained by gazing at the Form.

⁸ Stalley (1998, pp. 145–158). See especially 147.

section.⁹ From these observations one can draw a firm conclusion that in the theory of the Form and in the epistemological process in Plato's *Dialogues* there is a strong connection between truth (ἀλήθεια) and freedom (ἐλευθερία) and that true knowledge is especially of τὸ ὄν (what *is*), not τὸ γιγνόμενον (what comes into being/what changes). In other words, it is the knowledge of the truth of what always remains the same (the constant) that gives its possessor freedom from the servile status of ignorance caused by what keeps changing (the variables).

2 ἀλήθεια and ἐλευθερία in Galatians

Paul uses the word ἀλήθεια three times in Galatians (2.5, 14, 5.7). In the first two cases the word ἀλήθεια is qualified by τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. The whole phrase ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου refers to the content of the gospel that Paul preached.¹⁰ Therefore, the qualifier τοῦ εὐαγγελίου is best construed as an objective genitive. The third occurrence of ἀλήθεια in Gal 5.7 is an unqualified use, but it also presupposes the same conceptual link with τὸ εὐαγγέλιον as the first two, as the following verse (5.8) indicates through the phrase ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς, which resonates with the same expression ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς in Gal 1.6.¹¹ In other words, the word ἀλήθεια as it is used in Galatians has a specific connotation of the *truth of the gospel* which Paul originally preached to the churches in Galatia and which he is trying to defend in the current epistolary situation in Galatians.¹²

The first appearance of ἀλήθεια in Gal 2.5 is in the context of Paul's report on his experience at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem and as such it belongs

⁹ Cf. Woolf (2009, pp. 9–39). In this article Woolf argues that there is a distinction in the *Republic* between philosophical truth and non-philosophical truth and that only the former is considered worthy of possession in itself. It goes without saying that the philosophical truth is the truth about the Form that a philosopher comes to know.

¹⁰ Lührmann (1992, p. 39), “‘Truth’ here is more than simple correctness or truthfulness. It is a question of the content of the gospel, which Paul comprehends in the antithesis of law and faith.” The second half of Lührmann's statement is debatable, but the first half is certainly right.

¹¹ Betz (1979, pp. 264–65).

¹² Martyn (1997, p. 198). Based on this specificity of the term “truth” defined by the word “gospel”, Martyn argues that Paul here is not concerned to offer a philosophical discourse on truth. It is true that Paul is not making a generic statement on truth in this passage, but that does not necessarily make Paul's line of thought any less philosophical in a broad sense of the word.

to the *Narratio* section of the epistle (1.12–2.14), if one follows the Aristotelian rhetorical scheme applied to Galatians.¹³ Therefore, it takes a particular implication from the episode it talks about at that point of the narrative. That is, the truth of the gospel in this context has to do with the issue of the requirement of circumcision for Gentile believers.¹⁴ According to Paul in verses 3 and 5, by not letting Titus be circumcised, Paul and Barnabas managed not to submit to the “false brothers” even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might remain with the Gentile believers in Galatia.¹⁵ Here circumcision represents the boundary marker *par excellence* that distinguishes the Jews from the rest of the humanity as the chosen people of God.

The second occurrence of ἀλήθεια in Gal 2.14, which still belongs to the *Narratio* section of the epistle, is part of Paul’s recollections on the Antioch Incident. According to what Paul alleges in this highly polemical passage, Peter came to the Church of Antioch and he freely ate with the Gentile members of the church, but when certain individuals from James came, he withdrew from the common table and separated himself (ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν) from the Gentile believers, because he was afraid of the circumcision party (Gal 2.11). In Paul’s opinion, by doing this Peter stood condemned (κατεγνωσμένος) and the rest of the Jewish believers including even Barnabas joined Peter in his hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις). Paul then saw that they were not acting correctly toward the truth of the gospel (πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου), so he confronted Peter in front of all, accusing him of forcing the Gentile believers to follow Jewish customs, while Peter himself being a Jew was living like a Gentile (2.14).

Since circumcision itself is not an issue at the Antioch Incident, the phrase τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαΐζειν in 2.14 does not mean to compel them to be circumcised. It rather means to force the Gentile members of the church to honor the Jewish scruples about the Purity Law concerning table fellowship.¹⁶ If

¹³ Betz (1979, p. 16) categorizes Galatians as a judicial speech, while Kennedy (1984, p. 145) says Galatians is best viewed as deliberative rhetoric.

¹⁴ Matera (2007, p. 75), “The truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for Gentile believers that does not require circumcision.”; Longenecker (1990, p. 53) says the truth of the gospel in this passage refers to the true gospel proclaimed by Paul as opposed to the false gospel advocated by the Judaizers.

¹⁵ There are textual variants for οἷς οὐδὲ in v 5. But the variant readings are not well attested. I accept the current text of Nestle-Aland 28th that keeps οἷς οὐδὲ.

¹⁶ Matera (2007, p. 86); Dunn (2002, pp. 199–234). Recognizing the inherent ambiguity of the term ἰουδαΐζειν and its broad spectrum of possible meanings, Dunn says, “(It) denotes rather the range of possible degrees of assimilation to Jewish customs . . .” (220)

that is the case, Paul judges, Peter's behavior of separating himself (ἀφορίζεν ἑαυτὸν) from table fellowship, which obviously had the effect of forcing the Gentile believers to comply with the Jewish Kosher law, directly contradicted the truth of the gospel (ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) in that it re-introduced one of the boundary markers, the Purity Law in this case, which in Paul's opinion had been made unbinding with the coming of Jesus Christ. In Paul's view, the truth of the gospel includes the new idea that there is no longer separation (ἀφορίζειν) between Jews and Gentiles, and Paul judges that Peter has failed to live up to this truth.

To sum up, these two occurrences of the “truth of the gospel (ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου)”, one with the issue of the circumcision law (Gal 2.5) and the other with the purity law (2.14), are closely linked with each other through a common thread, that is, the abolishment of salvifically meaningful separation between Jews and Gentiles, which has obliterated the necessity of observing the laws of conventional boundary markers such as the circumcision or the purity law on the part of the Gentile members of the community.

This truth of the gospel is well articulated in the *Propositio* section of the epistle in Gal 2.15–21.¹⁷ Especially in verses 15–16, Paul puts forward a thesis statement (θέσις/πρόθεσις) of the entire argument of this epistle. As the opening phrase Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι in verse 15 unambiguously demonstrates, this thesis statement does not purport to represent a universal or a generic theological premise but a specifically Jewish-Christian theology articulated both in Jewish and in “Christian” terms, even though it has the potential to evolve into a more general theological doctrine in the future.¹⁸ Formulated as a condensed theological premise, this thesis statement assumes a more complex theological foundation in Jewish thought that has to do with salvation, broadly defined.¹⁹ For such a foundational theological discourse there may have been a set of common technical vocabulary but most probably not a consensus about the content of or the ways to salvation among various groups of people within the umbrella category of Second Temple Judaism. Therefore, it is natural to

¹⁷ Betz (1979, pp. 18–19); Witherington (1998, pp. 34–35).

¹⁸ Here I am using the term “Christian” not in the anachronistic sense of Christian religion but as a reference to the particular ways of defining self-identity among the members of the various communities within the so-called Jesus Movement.

¹⁹ Betz (1979, p. 115). Betz says that the *propositio* is composed of a great deal of doctrinal “abbreviations” and that these abbreviations are difficult to translate.

expect inherent ambiguities and a high degree of polyvalence from such a condensed theological thesis, which in current New Testament scholarship has resulted in the absence of scholarly consensus in the exegesis of this part of the epistle.

In verse 16 Paul uses ἄνθρωπος as a non-discriminatory reference to a human being, which is in and of itself a statement implying that there is no longer salvifically meaningful separation between Jews and Gentiles. This leads to a soteriological implication that in order to be saved Gentiles no longer have to become Jews by conversion, which is primarily, if not exclusively, symbolized by circumcision. In my exegetical observation, this aspect of the *Propositio* in Galatians is the most relevant content of the truth of the gospel as Paul conceives of it.

The two notorious cases of *crux interpretum* in Gal 2.16, i.e. ἐξ ἔργων νόμου and διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, have been intensely discussed in recent Pauline scholarship and a thorough engagement of the debate lies beyond the scope of this article.²⁰ The question whether the phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should be construed as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive does not really affect the content of the truth of the gospel in this particular context. That is, whether through the faith we have in Jesus Christ or through the faith/faithfulness that Jesus has, God has provided in Christ a new way to being put right (δικαιοῦται) apart from works of law.

On the other hand, Paul's categorical denial of the salvific efficacy of the works of law (ἔργα νόμου) in this verse has a claim to be part of the truth of the gospel in Paul's argument. The critical issue of the debate is whether the denotation of the phrase ἔργα νόμου is a certain aspect of or a particular set of commandments in the Torah or the entire Torah itself. The former was proposed by Origen and Jerome, who interpreted ἔργα νόμου as ceremonial laws, especially, the circumcision and the Sabbath.²¹ But the Reformation and its legacy have tended to regard ἔργα νόμου as meaning the Torah itself, which in

²⁰ Hays (2002), especially, the first appendix by Dunn and the second by Hays; For the latest discussion on these issues, see Owen (2007, pp. 553–577) and Hooker (2016, pp. 46–62).

²¹ Scheck (2008, pp. 48–49), “One should know that the works which Paul repudiates and frequently criticizes are not the works of righteousness, which are commanded in the law, but those in which they boast who keep the law according to the flesh; that is, *the circumcision of the flesh, the sacrificial rituals, the observance of Sabbaths and new moon festivals.*”; Scheck (2010, pp. 114), “I should ask about what is at hand: whether it was *works of the law, observance of the Sabbath, the superstition of circumcision and new moons* that gave you the Holy Spirit that you received?”

their opinion is based on works.²² Against this generic antinomian interpretation, James Dunn argues that ἔργα νόμου refers to a set of laws such as circumcision and food laws that functioned as identity markers for Jews after the Maccabean revolt for their ethnocentric soteriology.²³ The fact that Paul introduces this phrase ἔργα νόμου for the first time here in Gal 2.16 after he addressed the truth of the gospel twice, i.e. first, in conjunction with the circumcision (2.5) and secondly with the purity law (2.14), makes it plausible that with ἔργα νόμου Paul here is not just talking about the Tora in general but about a specific set of laws represented by the circumcision and the purity law, which Dunn calls identity markers for Jews. Plus, the linguistic parallel that Dunn points out between the Greek phrase ἔργα νόμου and its Hebrew equivalent מקצת מעשי התורה (some works of the Torah) found in 4QMMT to support his argument in this regard should be taken seriously. The similarities between the two at the basic lexical level are striking and unmistakable. A certain degree of intertextuality must have existed between the two. Therefore, in agreement with Dunn's interpretation of ἔργα νόμου, I take Paul's denial of the salvific efficacy of ἔργα νόμου not as an explicit antinomian stance against the Torah *per se* but as a rejection of the ethnocentric soteriology based on certain laws in the Torah that emphasize the separation of the Jews from Gentiles. Such an ethnocentric soteriology would naturally have imposed circumcision as an entry requirement on the Gentile believers, which is exactly what Paul is fighting against in Galatians. By declaring that Gentile believers are justified without having to become Jews by circumcision, Paul here lays out a core content for the truth of the gospel as he understands it. It is this *truth* (ἀλήθεια) of the gospel that guarantees *freedom* (ἐλευθερία) for Paul and the Gentile members of his communities, more specifically, freedom from the obligation of the ceremonial laws, especially the circumcision law, that force Gentiles to become who they are not.

²² This position is summarized and defended in Westerholm (2004, pp. 300–321).

²³ Dunn (1998, pp. 354–59); idem (2005, pp. 213–226).

3 Paul's Inner Logic of the Truth that engenders Freedom

At this point a question concerning the line of thought in Paul's theological argument is in order. That is, on what basis could Paul make such a *truth* claim and an ensuing declaration of *freedom*? There seems to exist a significant leap of logic between what Paul saw in his experience of the revelation and what he articulates as theological truth in Galatians. In other words, it is one thing for Paul to come to believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that God has called him to preach the gospel among the Gentiles (Gal 1.16) but it is quite another for him to say that in Christ there is no salvifically meaningful distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Gal 2.5, 3.28). What is Paul's inner theological reasoning that would have convinced him of the soundness of his newest theological statement about truth and freedom, which has already caused serious objection from the Jewish Christian sectors in his time and which would eventually be rejected by most Jews during and after the rabbinic period?²⁴

My suggestion is that the *truth* of the gospel which Paul lays out in Galatians, i.e. the premise that circumcision is no longer required of the Gentile believers because in Christ God has obliterated the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, ultimately relies on the more fundamental soteriological *truth* that it is solely by God's grace (χάρις) that a human being could be justified before God. Paul uses this word χάρις in key strategic places in Galatians. First of all it appears at the beginning (1:3) and at the end (6:18) to form a rhetorical *inclusio* bracketing the whole epistle.²⁵ It is true that the word χάρις does not appear in the *Thesis* statement *per se* (2.15–16), but it is used at the end of the *Propositio* section (2.21) as a reference to the very foundation of Paul's thesis. Also in Gal 1.6 and 2.9, the same word is used in a heavily soteriological sense. This concept of justification by the grace of God will be more explicitly stated later in Rom 3.24 (δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι). The point is that whether explicitly stated or not, the notion that salvation is only by the grace of God is always assumed in the soteriological discourse in Judaism.

²⁴ The critical difference between Paul and the rabbis on the issue of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is articulated by Boyarin in terms of two diametrically opposed and yet closely paralleled hermeneutical systems for reading the scriptures in Judaism. See Boyarin (1997, pp. 232–36).

²⁵ Barclay (2015, p.331) says, "Bracketing his letter in this way, Paul situates its contexts within a movement of grace from God (and Christ) to the Galatians."

Having thus recognized the *truth* that the grace of God is the sole foundation for salvation, Paul begins to recognize the absolute *freedom* that God exercises in terms of providing new ways to dispense the salvific grace to human beings. The newness of what God has done in Christ is already hinted at in Gal 2.15–16 and 3.23–27. What is only implicit in these passages in Galatians will be more explicitly stated later in Rom 3.21–22. Paul’s choice of word in the phrase *vvv̄i δὲ* in Rom 3.21 indicates that he certainly understands his current soteriology as an articulation of something radically new that God is doing in Christ *over and beyond* the conventionally understood means of salvation, which is expressed by *χωρὶς νόμου*. The underlying principle is that even though the means of justification and salvation may vary, the grace of God as the only foundation of salvation remains the same.

It has been recently recognized that this grace-based soteriology is part of the common denominator of Jewish soteriology, of which Pauline soteriology is a part. In my observation the notion of Covenantal Nomism, which E. P. Sanders first proposed in 1977,²⁶ has successfully weathered various criticisms over the past few decades. I believe it has by now been established as a very viable conceptual category of a common pattern of Jewish soteriology during the Second Temple period. Even though Paul may have significantly altered the content of the Covenantal Nomism *per se* as a common soteriological concept in the Judaism of his time,²⁷ what still remains nonetheless in all Jewish soteriologies including the Pauline rendition of it is the grace of God as the sole foundation of salvation.²⁸ In other words, in Jewish and Jewish-Christian soteriological discourses the grace of God is the *constant* and all the different means of justification, whether through the Torah or apart from it, whether by our faith in Jesus Christ or by the faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ, are the *variables*. Once this is recognized, then one could see the absolute *freedom* of God in dispensing God’s saving grace to human beings in different phases of the salvation history. Such absolute freedom of God seems to have become, for the line of Paul’s thoughts in Galatians, the underlying source for the *freedom*

²⁶ For the definition of Covenantal Nomism, see Sanders (1977, p. 75, 236, & 422).

²⁷ Sanders (1977, pp. 513–14).

²⁸ See Sanders (2009, pp. 23–55). Here Sanders argues that covenantal nomism is an underlying principle in Judaism and therefore it may not be stated explicitly in every Jewish text. He also points out that reward and punishment in Jewish literature should be understood in a larger context, i.e. “that of the love of God who reaches out to people and who will save those whom he punishes.”

that he talks about in Gal 2.4 in conjunction with the *truth* of the gospel. That is, only those who know this particular aspect of the *truth* of the gospel can have the *freedom* within the scope of the new way the grace of God is being dispensed.

This close correlation between *truth* and *freedom* in Galatians is not in correspondence with a generic nature of the dialectic between knowing truth and having freedom as a universally desired human condition, if there is such a thing, but it is a highly particular cause-and-effect phenomenon with a particular content, as is the case with the Platonic notion of the link between knowing/contemplating the truth and being liberated in *The Symposium* and in *The Republic*, which is discussed earlier in Section I of this article. Also, unlike the Platonic concept of truth, which is secured by rigorous philosophical pursuits and by recollection (ἀνάμνησις) of the prior innate knowledge, Paul's understanding of truth is based on the truth by *revelation* (ἀποκάλυψις) both for what we called earlier in this article the *constant*, i.e. the grace of God as the sole foundation of salvation, which Paul takes from the scriptures and from the common soteriological premise in his Jewish tradition, and the *variables*, i.e. the various means of justification that leads to salvation, which he has come to realize through his own private revelation (Gal 1.16). At the same time, in spite of this significant difference, there is a fundamental similarity between the notion of truth in the Platonic corpus and that in the Pauline Epistles. That is, both in the *Dialogues* of Plato and on the Epistles of Paul, the truth that has the liberating power is fundamentally the truth about what remains the same, i.e. the truth about the constant as opposed to the variables. In Plato's case it is *what is* (τὸ ὄν) as the ultimate Form; in Paul's case it is the grace (χάρις) of God as the sole foundation of salvation. This *truth* of the gospel lets Paul and the Gentile members of the Galatian churches recognize the absolute *freedom* of God to provide new ways of justification for human beings on the one hand and the *freedom* given to the Gentiles not to be bound by the works of law on the other.

4 Conclusion and Implications

I have made an exegetical observation that the close link between the *truth* of the gospel and the ensuing *freedom* that Paul talks about in Galatians has to be taken as a logical outcome from his train of thought in soteriology, in which the grace of God is regarded as the sole foundation for human salvation (the

constant), whereas the multiple concrete terms of justification such as the commandments of the Torah as the old covenant and the faith/faithfulness in/of Jesus as the terms of the new covenant are manifestations of the different ways of dispensing God's grace (the *variables*). When one knows this *truth*, one has the *freedom* from any form of bondage that contradicts the truth. The bondage takes the form of the circumcision law and the food laws in Galatians. *Mutatis mutandis*, the bondage could be applied to any other terms that might limit the absolute freedom of God in choosing the way God's grace is to be dispensed. This theologically significant potential is not fully developed in any concrete terms in Galatians. Rather it is only intimated in highly suggestive terms.²⁹ On the other hand, looking further toward a later time in Paul's life, one can see a possibility that Paul is actually thinking exactly in these terms in Romans, as he expresses his intense wishes for the salvation of Israel in chapters 9 to 11, especially in 11.26, in which Paul declares all Israel will be saved (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).

This highly loaded sentence in Rom 11.26 has been interpreted from two very different perspectives in recent New Testament scholarship. One is to read Paul's statement here as a reference to a massive last minute conversion of all the Jews to the belief in Christ, which is believed as the only way for all the Jews to be saved.³⁰ Another more recent view tends to interpret it as Paul's hope and conviction that all Israel will ultimately be saved on the basis of the covenantal faithfulness of God, which safeguards the continuing validity of the original Covenant.³¹ If the latter interpretation is correct, as I think it is, the distinction between the grace of God as the *constant* and the multiple means of

²⁹ For this reason, such a meaning is construed only when one allows room for ambiguities inherent in any condensed theological discourse, especially in Pauline epistles. In that regard I thoroughly agree with Hays (2002, p. 227), in which he says that Paul's language in Galatians is highly allusive and that it is less univocal and more 'poetic' than the Western theological tradition has usually supposed.

³⁰ For example, Witherington III (2004, p. 275), "We must remember that Paul has been discussing non-Christian Jews. He already knew of many saved Jewish Christians and it is hardly likely he has them in view here. Rather, he says this 'all Israel' group will be saved after the full number of Gentiles has come in. Therefore, he is talking about a *mass conversion of non-Christian Jews at the end of salvation history*." (Italics mine); Wright (2013, pp. 1231–1252). Wright argues that in Romans 11.26 Paul is envisioning the "saveability of Jews within the *continuing* purpose of God". (Italics his) By this Wright means that the unbelieving Jews will continue to be open to grace and to be received back to belief in the Messiah and thus they will be saved, not necessarily, however, at the last phase of the salvation history.

³¹ Stendahl (1995, pp. 33–44); Dunn (1988, pp. 681–683); Gager (2000, pp. 128–142); Spencer (2006, pp. 113–138); Nanos (2012, pp. 3–21); Reasoner (2014, pp. 388–404).

justification as the *variables* should indeed be regarded as the logical foundation for the newly formulated soteriological vision of Paul for the entire Israel in Rom 9–11, which I believe is clearly influenced by his reflections on the *truth* and the *freedom* in Galatians. A thorough treatment of such a topic concerning Rom 9–11 would be an important follow-up on the observations I have made in this article and it would certainly require another study at the level of monograph rather than an article. This line of inquiry will do justice to the complexities of Paul's theology of salvation against the pitfalls of reducing it to a few slogans, which oftentimes fails to honor the rich reservoir of meanings in theological discourse.

5 Reference List

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