

THE POWER OF CREATION IN PAUL'S WRITINGS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOSPEL

1. Introduction

According to the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostle Paul was the most active missionary of his time and left his mark from the very beginning of church history, especially in written form. These writings consist primarily of letters he wrote to the churches he and others founded during his three missionary journeys.

What made his writings so special is the dynamism and conviction regarding the Gospel that they contain. In addition to the fire that he had in his heart for the Gospel, is the depth of argumentation that he puts forward on the various biblical and theological topics. This was already mentioned by the Apostle Peter during his lifetime,¹ because Paul's arguments were outstanding from the beginning but at the same time sometimes difficult to understand.

In this lecture I would like to address a specific genre of Paul's arguments that are rooted in the Torah, particularly regarding God's creative power. For the apostle, the biblical-Semitic culture of perceiving this creative power of God is an indispensable prerequisite for being able to believe in Jesus as the Christ and for clarifying the dimension of revelation in his person.

This biblical-Semitic culture of perception of Paul is the basis for the depth of his arguments, but also the problem that repeatedly leads to different hermeneutical interpretations of his theology. Because the main theme

of the apostle to the Gentiles, righteousness through faith, is not based on earthly wisdom or intelligence, but *exclusively* on the wisdom and glory of God, who created space and time and has been continuously active in his creation ever since.² This fact makes Paul's argument so exciting on the one hand, but on the other hand its logical conclusion can become so complex that it cannot be clearly classified into one paradigm. And this ultimately leads to several possible interpretations.

The reason for these complex logical structures is not least because in his statements Paul repeatedly goes back to the origins of the biblical-Semitic faith in the Holy Scriptures in order to underline the depth and seriousness of his argument. He is not concerned with a *new* wisdom - nor with the wisdom of the dualistic thinking of the Greeks, but exclusively with the evidence from the revelation of God, as it was revealed to the people of Israel from the beginning. Without this congruence between the gospel and the Torah, between Jesus and YHWH, there can be no gospel of the righteousness of God. This can lead to leaps in Paul's argument that are sometimes so sporadic, rapid, and short-winded that it takes your breath away. This is Paul in his full dimension - thorough and detailed.

Based on 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, let us examine this phenomenon of Paul and see which dimensions of insight we can gain once we have dealt in depth with the full extent of his line of argumentation.

Text: 2 Cor 4:1-6

1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, according to the mercy shown to us, we do not grow weary,

2 but we avoid secret dealings, which are shameful, and we do not deal in deceit, nor do we falsify the word of God; but by the revelation of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of all men in the sight of God.

3 If then our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

4 to those who do not believe, whose minds the god of this world has blinded, lest they should see *the bright light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and we your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2. The Church Situation

In Corinth, some members of the church claimed that Paul was not a real apostle because he was not one of the Twelve who had been with Jesus from the beginning. But their real intention was something else, to spread false teachings in the church that were neither consistent with the Gospel nor with the Torah. This false teaching involved libertine actions that threatened to disrupt the unity and morality of the church in Corinth (1:10-13; 5:1). This teaching might have come up because of a misunderstanding of Christian freedom – or even out of evil intent. Because these false teachings essentially contradicted the essence of the Gospel that Paul had presented in his first letter to the Corinthians, the false teachers tried to discredit Paul in order to undermine the authority of his interpretation of church life (3:5-6 and 18).

In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul begins his response to the claims of his opponents in

Corinth. Here he first uses the claim of revealed "truth." And since this truth was revealed by God, it is therefore normative for all mankind. And since this truth is obvious and accessible to all people, it does not have to be preached in secret - or behind the backs of others, as the false teachers allegedly did (v. 2). Since the revealed truth of God is not a secret, it must therefore always be preached or spoken openly. Only those who are blinded by (their own) lies and do not want to accept God's revealed truth, the content and purpose of the gospel remains veiled to them (v. 3). Because when a person is seduced and blinded by the "god of this world", he cannot see and understand "the bright light of truth" revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but remains in darkness. Whereas the light of the gospel testifies to the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (v. 4).

Here Paul uses the second theme, which is "light," parallel to the claim of "truth" in order to describe the nature of Christ and his gospel. The blinded false teachers cannot see this light of the gospel (v. 4), since they serve the god of this world who has blinded them. Paul thus presents the "truth of God" as the "revealed light" that has been given to us through the gospel. In other words: **without the (bright) light of the gospel we cannot come to the truth of God;** for Christ is the image of God. And this truth, which can be perceived through the light of the gospel, consequently determines our thinking and behaviour.

Paul perceives himself exclusively as a servant of God's truth (vv. 1+5) and only wants to preach this truth which is the gospel of Jesus Christ! And by only preaching this gospel to the Corinthians, he also becomes a servant of this church; for he does not preach *his own* opinion, nor does he want anything for himself, but he *only* wants to give them the truth of the gospel, which teaches that only Jesus Christ is Lord (v. 5) and not Paul. Thus, it is not his own truth that he is preaching, but the truth of the glory of Christ, which is able to

lead the Corinthians into God's truth. Paul himself, and consequently the Corinthians too, are responsible towards this "Lord"-ship of Christ alone.

In fact, the problem of the false teachers of the Corinthians would have ended with verse 5 – because the "bright light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God," had already appeared to the Corinthians and thus verse 6 seems superfluous! Or, what additional knowledge could the Corinthians – and with them we today – gain from this verse after Paul has explained his view concerning the revelation of the gospel in verses 1-5?

Here is verse 6 again: **For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

In this context we might be able to locate in verse 6 another "analogy", that both realities were accomplished through God's Word: just as the Word of God spoke *in the beginning* to create the light in space and time, so did the Word of God, who became flesh *at the end* of time in Jesus Christ, speaking to us humans to ignite the *spiritual* light in our hearts through the gospel! This certainly is a correct analogy that can deepen our understanding of the Word of God in relation to Jesus Christ. But this analogy falls short and does not explain the literary leap that Paul is obviously making here.

It is precisely because of such leaps that Paul is described as difficult to understand or even eccentric (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). So, what is Paul's purpose with this comparison? Why does he bring up a completely new topic "the light of creation" which is at least as difficult as the topic "the light of the gospel"? What is he trying to convey to his listeners?

To get further on with this question, we must first ask what was Paul trying to convey to

his listeners with his introduction to chapter four? Paul certainly wanted to emphasize that firstly, he is exclusively concerned with the revealed "truth of God" and not with his own need for recognition, as was the case with some of the Corinthians. Only in his service to *the truth of God* was Paul able to demand that the Corinthians also submit to *his* gospel. He does not demand that they submit to *his* truth or to his own opinion or authority, but exclusively to "God's truth".

To emphasize this "truth of God," Paul puts his gospel, which he received from God (1:1; 2:4), on the same level as the only other legitimate authority that comes from God which is *the authority of the Torah*, so that the Corinthians would not have the slightest doubt about the authority of his kerygma. Against this background, the central question arises: What is "truth" for Paul? Or, to put it another way: From where does Paul derive his understanding of truth?

Pontius Pilate already asked Jesus this question: "What is truth?" And Jesus answered him: **He who is of the truth hears my voice** (John 18:37). Thus, the basic question in all legal and theological discourses is always the same: What is truth and how can truth be determined?

Unfortunately, this truth is in a very bad state in our time – despite all the intelligence that humanity has achieved through the sciences. Because hardly anyone looks for the truth anymore, and certainly not for the truth that comes from God! This is a sad testimony of our time. Because only through the truth of God can man be "rightly guided"; without the truth of God, man and with him the world are lost.³

What does the light of creation have in common with the light of the gospel in verse 6 to confirm this truth of God that Paul is trying so hard to establish here?

3. The light of the gospel is Christ, the image of God

Here we need to jump to the topic of “light of creation” to better understand this connection. In Genesis 1:3-5 we read:

3 And God said: “Let there be light!” - and there was light.

4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness

5 And God called the light day, and the darkness night. And the evening and the morning became (the first) one day.

V. 3 And God said: Let there be light! – and there was light.

When God uttered this word, he was in his spirit⁴ beyond physics, in what is known as *metaphysics* or *transcendence*. After he had uttered this word, however, *physical* light arose, which from then on would determine space and time and thus physics *in general*.⁵

The Hebrew word used in the original text for light is *ur*, which can be translated as “fire” or “light”. However, physical light⁶ can only emanate from a physical source that can produce energy or visible and/or invisible waves. This source of light, whether light or fire, can only be a physical process that generates electromagnetic waves, such as burning, oxidation, explosion, radiation, atomic decay or fusion. Light can therefore only be generated through one or more of these processes. It is not possible to directly determine through the text from what source the light was generated on the first day of creation. In any case, it cannot come from the sun, since, according to Scripture, it was created on the fourth day.

This physical light that God created was stronger than the darkness and broke its power. After its creation, the light, through its radiance, overcame the darkness that covered the depths of creation in verse 2. This breakthrough was the “visible” beginning of the physical world.

V. 4 And God saw that the light was good. So God separated the light from the darkness [...]

And God saw that the light was “good”, for it had overcome the darkness that held back space and time. Therefore the breakthrough of light became the “law” for the visible physical world, even for space and time.⁷ This visible cosmos was according to the will of God, which he revealed through his word when he spoke it.

Everything that follows from the word of God is thus a revelation and serves both the physical and spiritual laws of creation and is thus “good.” And by “good” this physical system of light that his word created is defined as *sustainable*; for it cannot be changed, but remains continuously. It is thus a law for the entire cosmos - a universal law!

After God’s Word had created the dynamics of light in the form of particles and waves, He thereby *supplemented* the state of darkness that previously covered the depths of creation and kept them invisible or inactive. Thus, we now have *two* states of the cosmos: the state of light that illuminates creation and makes it *visible*, and the state of darkness that covers the depths of creation and makes them *invisible*.⁸

By creating light - which also defines “being” - God abolished the *sole* power of darkness – the “non-being” - and made a *decisive* distinction between these two states; because at that point both forces were to rule in the *physical* creation: light and darkness - “being” and “non-being”!

V. 5 [...] and (he) called the light day and the darkness night.

In physics, light is defined as an atomic activity; to emit light waves an *active* source of energy is required. Thus darkness, which is the opposite of light, becomes a synonym for the motionlessness or resting state of atoms; for

as long as atoms are inactive, there is no light, physically speaking, but darkness prevails.

God called the light day when energy was in the active state, and when energy was in the resting state, it was called night. And as the names suggest, light was to prevail by day and darkness by night. This is how this *polarity* between “day and night” came about in physical creation.

The light that was called into “life” by God’s word, however, is not a *single* explosion or discharge of energy like lightning, for example. Rather, it is a permanent *process* in physical creation, lasting for a whole day and then subsiding, only to reappear after the night, the state of rest or regeneration. Thus, light itself, in its interaction with darkness, forms a *cyclical process* of discharge throughout the entire universe of physical existence.

And there was evening and there was morning, one day

After God had created the light, he now began the decisive *cycle* of physical creation: there was evening after the day and then there was morning - after the night. That is the definition of “a day”. The sequence of day and night through the evening and the morning is therefore “one day” by biblical definition!

This cycle of creation, the day, with its gentle phase of transition from day to night and from night to day, does *not only* refer to the earth. Because in verses 3 - 5 the actual earth is not mentioned. These verses are primarily related to the darkness that covered the primordial depths of creation.⁹

We must therefore assume that this is exclusively about the *universal* light of creation and its interaction with the darkness that defines the pulse of physical existence, of space and time, indeed of “being” and “non-being”. Thus, the “universal day” is defined here and not just an “earth day”.

This cycle of day and night, which represents the rhythmic sequence of light and darkness, was now to become entirely the *pulse* of God’s creation. The entire physical universe is thus subject to this pulse and cannot be changed.¹⁰ Yes, this one “primal day” has become the cycle of all physical existence in space and time. And with the cycle of this primeval day, which was brought to life by the interaction of light and darkness, the history of time began.¹¹

The creation of light and its cyclical interaction with darkness thus became the foundation of physical thermodynamics, which ionizes matter in the universe. The planet Earth was then shaped and formed through these principles of thermodynamics, until air and soil emerged on it to enable life on Earth. These thermodynamics later on formed the solar system in which our planet Earth is located. Then God created the plants (botany) on this Earth, caused animals to emerge in the water and on the dry land (zoology) and finally created man in his image.

All of this was created based on the light that God proclaimed and the thermodynamics associated with it. Without light there would be no space and time and without the interaction with darkness there would be no physical reality, neither for the cosmos nor for our earth and certainly not for our life on it. Thus, for Paul and all those who think biblically and Semitically, this light is the basis for our existential reality. This awareness of reality forms the absolute truth of our being and our existence accordingly. Without the light that the Creator created, nothing would exist!

4. The relationship between the “light of the gospel” and the “truth of the Torah”

This creation story is how every biblical-Semitic person thinks about the truth. Primarily the true Israelite as well as everyone who believes in the gospel. Because without this belief in the statement of the Torah, the Isra-

elite cannot believe in God and consequently neither can the Gentile. This congruence must exist. That is why Paul cited God's first act of creation, the light of creation and life, as proof of the truth of the gospel in Jesus Christ and made it its basis. And how did Paul understand this relationship?

We quote again verse 6 from 2 Corinthians chapter 4:

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

a) *Light of creation, light of knowledge*

God, who brought light into existence through his word, has also given the "light" in our hearts - Luther speaks here of the "bright" glow, because this illumination has outshone all other lights of science and knowledge in his heart.¹²

This "illumination" is diametrically opposed to both the darkness of creation and the darkness in the human heart. But just as the light of creation has overcome the darkness and created the life that we humans are allowed to enjoy on earth, the "bright" light of the gospel also overcomes the darkness that the god of this world (v. 4) has caused in our hearts.

b) *The glory of God*

In both cases, it is the "light of God" that comes from his glory. The first time, when God spoke and created space and time, which served to make man a living being - in the image of God. The second time, through Jesus Christ - who is the image of God and whose message ignited a bright light in our hearts. Through Christ's coming, a new creation was created that leads to resurrection and eternal life, as Paul then explains in the following chapter.

Through the first light, the first Adam was created in the image of God. However,

through his fall in sin, he lost this glory of God, which he owned. The second light, which came through the gospel, enlightens our hearts to know the glory of God. This new creation is no longer subject to physics, like the first creation, but is spiritual in nature.

This glory of God is now reflected in the face of Jesus Christ, who revealed it to us on earth. Thus, Jesus is the second Adam, the image of God. Therefore, the act of creation in the Torah is repeated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, this new creation is no longer subject to physics, like the first creation, but only subject to Jesus Christ, who has overcome physics through his resurrection.

c) *The glory of Christ*

Since the gospel has ignited the light of the "glory of God" in our hearts, the truth content of the gospel is to be equated with the truth of the Torah, which sees the glory of God in the fact that HE brought forth the light out of darkness. Thus, the light of the gospel (v. 4) is to be equated with the light of creation - both in its power and in its significance for humanity - and is to be understood as a new and unique act of creation by God. For both lights, that of creation and that of the gospel, testify to the glory of God! And everything that testifies to God's glory can only be the "real truth of our existence", just like the light that led to our real existence in space and time. However, as Paul continues in chapter 5, this "new" real existence remains forever through the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹³

Since these two lights that reveal the glory of God are congruent (= equal), this means that the one who revealed the glory of God is himself a reflection of the glory of God. As Jesus is the author of the gospel, he is thus the reflection of the glory of God, which is equal to the image of God, like the first Adam. This glorious task of Jesus Christ is

his personal glory. And every person who has received the gospel of Jesus Christ has Christ shining brightly in their heart, lighting the way to divine knowledge. This is God's new creation and his eternal truth. And since the gospel that Paul preaches is the truth of God, it cannot be rewritten or reinterpreted by humans - not even by the Corinthians.

5. The truth that Paul ministers to

In our Western cultures, as was the case with the Corinthians back then, truth is often referred to as "physical reality". But what is physics or reality? Today, in the age of technology, we need to explain the term "reality" in more detail; because this term is very abstract and has philosophical connotations and is therefore no longer easy to interpret.

Reality in our dualistic perception can be both an "idea" and an "object". Therefore, our understanding of reality must be made more precise in order to understand the difference between the dialectical and biblical-Semitic conception of truth.

a) The dialectical truth

An example: If you want to buy a car, you first compile the technical data to get an idea of the car you plan to buy. But this data initially consists only of "thoughts", i.e. an idea of the vehicle you want to buy. This data which you have collected in your mind is considered to be a concept or a fact in our dualistic society, even if the vehicle you have in mind has not been manufactured or bought yet. But such facts are considered to be the basis for truth in our western way of thinking since the data that you have compiled serves as the basis for the vehicle that is still to be built or bought. They therefore form the framework for our understanding of "reality".

The question we must ask ourselves in this context is: Can my idea or concept of a "physical" object already be the truth?

b) The Biblical-Semitic Truth

For Paul, who thinks in a biblical-Semitic framework, reality and truth have a completely different dimension. The biblical-Semitic dimension of truth and reality can only be what was previously revealed or created by God. The light that God created first in creation is not just any truth or reality that can be arbitrarily compiled or interpreted, but it is "the existential reality" per se, which has existed since the beginning of creation and is therefore absolutely identical with the truth of the Torah that Moses received from God.

In relation to the gospel that Paul preached, this means that truth is only confirmed when the truth of the gospel is congruent with the truth of the Torah. Only then can the reality preached by Paul be the absolute truth - just like the Torah. Thus, the Torah is the measure of truth for Paul by which the gospel must be measured! Only when these facts, which form the basis of biblical-Semitic truth, are congruent, can the truth of the Gospel be confirmed.

c) The truth is only God, as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ

If someone walks in this truth of God and takes it seriously, then, according to Paul's understanding, this person cannot pursue his earthly desires, but knows that he must orientate himself according to the mind of Christ. For if a person does not bend his life to God's truth, he forfeits his life, both earthly and spiritual (v. 2).

To underline the seriousness of this statement and the dependency of man on God's truth, Paul underlined his message at the end with this digression on the "light of creation" to be able to draw a comparison between the Torah and the gospel. And just as the light of creation is existentially necessary for our earthly life, the light of the gospel is also necessary for our spiritual knowledge or spiritual enlightenment. And this light of the gospel is the glory of Christ, the image of God!

Hence, the argument that Paul uses in verse 6 is not an *unnecessary* analogy, but a deepening and condensation of the revealed truth of God through the gospel. For the Corinthians had already received the gospel and had already been instructed in it. With this argument he wanted to show them the seriousness of God's truth for their existence should they completely turn away from him. For God's truth refers to both the physical and the spiritual life. This relationship was obscured by the false teachers in Corinth. But this is a serious and existential matter - a matter of life and death!

In summary, one can say that with this addition (verse 6) Paul wanted to make it clear that those Corinthians who question his message and do not want to bow to his gospel are in fact not bowing to the Torah that they supposedly defend. With their disobedience to the gospel that Paul preaches, they also deny the **God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness."** For this is the same God who "[...] **has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**"

ENDNOTES

1 See 2 Peter 3:15-16.

2 2 Corinthians 1:21-31.

3 See also Jeremiah 8:9.

4 In John 4:24 Jesus says to the Samaritan woman: God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.

5 If you want to see Einstein's theory of relativity as the basis of the laws of physics, then physics can only have become active when light was created, since physical relativity depends exclusively on the speed of light.

6 Fire and light are still referred to only as "light".

7 Since energy and matter are proportional to the speed of light according to Einstein's theory of relativity, there can be neither space nor time without light.

8 Similar to dead matter or black holes, which prevent all light.

9 In contrast to the darkness that covered the *tehom* (Hebrew for "depths") at creation, the earth is

covered only by water (Gen 1:2c).

10 Einstein's theory of relativity defines the interaction between matter and energy in mathematical terms. And it is precisely this interaction between these *two* elementary quantities of the physical universe that causes light and darkness. The timing of this interaction is the day/night or light/darkness cycle, which is at the center of existence. According to the Torah, neither darkness nor light alone determine creation, it is only the joint rhythm that exists between this physical interaction that awakens the cosmos to activity and life.

11 The time cycle covers both the microcosm and the macrocosm without distinction.

12 We must not forget that Luther studied philosophy and sought "the light of knowledge." That is why he deliberately emphasized this spiritual "bright" light in his translation of the Gospel which superseded all intellectual understanding.

13 If we now move away from the "real truth" that says that God created light with space and time, we also move away from the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us eternal life. According to Paul, this also had a specific effect on the Corinthians (see also chapters 5f).