Abstract
Whereas 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 is traditionally understood as a polemic against Judaean and the Mosaic law, a close examination of its rhetoric of moral freedom in light of nearly contemporaneous philosophers, and Philo of Alexandria in particular, necessitates a different conclusion. As part of his self-depiction as a sophos, Paul critiques Moses’ mediation of the law by invoking Stoic philosophical traditions which relativize slavery and freedom and assert that written codes of law are insufficient for freedom in order to claim that Moses limited divine revelation. In this way, Paul casts Moses’ mediation as a foil for his mediation of the gospel, which allegedly does not limit revelation but affords freedom apart from the written law. Paul never castigates the law or Judaean; instead, he critiques Mosaic mediation in order to bolster his own authority as a mediator of divine revelation.

Keywords
Freedom, moral philosophy, Mosaic law, Philo of Alexandria, slavery
For scholars who contend that the Judaean apostle Paul viewed the Torah positively, 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 is a problem. Paul’s infamous ‘letter kills and spirit gives life’ argument is usually read as a polemic against Jews, Judaism and the Mosaic law. Victor Furnish (1985: 233), for instance, states that a main point of Paul’s argument here is that, ‘In its synagogues unbelieving Israel hears the covenant of Moses read ... with veiled [minds], not understanding that in Christ that old covenant and its ministry are being annulled’.3 Unfortunately, in most scholarship advocating Paul’s positive view of the law, treatments of this passage are conspicuously absent.4 In this article, I endeavor to rectify this oversight by demonstrating that 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 is not negative towards Judaeans or the Mosaic law. I argue that the language that Paul uses in this passage is remarkably consistent with nearly contemporaneous philosophical discussions of moral freedom, wherein written laws are considered insufficient for freedom, though not invalid or flawed. Among these rarely acknowledged comparanda, Philo of Alexandria’s Quod omnis probus liber sit (That Every Good Man is Free [Prob.]) is especially important, because Philo brings the Mosaic law into a discussion of moral freedom much like Paul does in 2 Corinthians.5 Both authors agree that

2. See, *inter alia*, Eisenbaum 2009: 5, 219-33. For an overview of traditional and revisionist scholarship on Paul and Judaism, see Zetterholm 2009. A brief note on terminology: following Mason (2007), among others, I choose to translate and discuss ‘Judaean’ instead of ‘Jews’ (especially in relation to Ιουδαίος and its cognates) in the period covered by this article. I do this so that the associated territory (Ἰουδαία/Judaea) and its ethnic associations are omnipresent in the translation in keeping with ancient nomenclature (e.g., the ethnic groups listed in Homer’s *Iliad* 2.494-759). My employment of the term ‘Judaean’, like my decision not to use the term ‘Christian’ for the Pauline communities, is not intended to generate any more historical dissonance between ancient and modern practitioners of these religions than is warranted by the ancient evidence. Instead, its purpose is to highlight an aspect of ancient group nomenclature often lost on moderns but essential for understanding ancient Judaean self-perceptions and the position of Judaean in the Graeco-Roman world (e.g., the collection of the *fiscus Judaicus* throughout the Roman Empire as a consequence of a provincial revolt in Judaea). For various perspectives on these issues, see the essays in the recent *Marginalia* forum, ‘Jew or Judean: Have Scholars Erased the Jews from Antiquity? ’ (August 2014).

3. Similarly, in an attempt to salvage a neutral view of the law for Paul, N.T. Wright (1991: 192) emphasizes that the problem was not the Torah but the state of heart of the Israelites. Neotraditionalist scholars go further than Furnish and Wright in viewing this passage as a polemic against Judaean and Torah; e.g., Grindheim 2001: 97-115.

4. For instance, Tomson 1990; Bockmuehl 2000; Gager 2000; Eisenbaum 2009. Lloyd Gaston (1987: 151-68) treats the passage at length; however, his tenuous imposition of conjectures about Paul’s opponents’ doctrines and practices onto Paul’s argument renders his efforts to reread this passage unsuccessful.

5. Surprisingly, scholars have only rarely, and inadequately, brought Paul into dialogue with Philo with respect to 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6. The best attempt is Furnish 1985: 237-38. There are three important works comparing Paul and Philo on freedom that do not treat 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 in particular, and yet are relevant for the present study: Ade 1996; Byron 2003; Galloway 2004. Also of interest on this topic is Garnsey 1996: 153-88. Regarding Paul and Philo on the
written laws can inhibit freedom, but whereas Philo creates an exception for the Mosaic law, Paul invokes this philosophical trope as part of his self-depiction as a free and wise man in order to explain that the gospel he mediates is better equipped to ensure freedom for Gentiles than the Mosaic law.

In his influential essay ‘Paul and Paradigm Shifts’ (2001), John Fitzgerald argues that Paul inherited a scriptural paradigm in which slavery is conceptually aligned with Egypt and freedom with the establishment of the Mosaic law at Mt Sinai, and that he has transformed it so that freedom now means liberation from the law instead of liberation into the law. Building on Fitzgerald’s observation, I contend that the Exodus narrative with which Paul engages in 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 evinces a paradigm in which Torah is linked to freedom, and that Paul is reinventing this paradigm. At the apex of his argument, Paul claims that not in the written Mosaic law, but ‘where the spirit of the Lord is, is freedom’ (3.17). For the most part, commentators have either overlooked or been perplexed by Paul’s singular employment of the term ‘freedom’ (ελευθερία) in this context. I argue, however, that the term invokes a conceptual linkage group whose other components are easily recognized in this passage when Paul’s argument is compared with nearly contemporaneous discussions of freedom.

I present my argument in three sections. I begin with a brief discussion of the Stoic sources on moral freedom, and the role of law in them. I then proceed to examine Philo’s views on moral freedom and the Mosaic law, especially in his Prob. Next, I turn to 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 to identify the components of the philosophical traditions about freedom and the law in Paul’s argument and offer a fresh reading of that passage. I conclude by considering the implications of this rereading for understanding Paul’s view of the Mosaic law.

unwritten law, one study stands out: Martens 1991b. Martens also does not treat 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 directly and, while his treatment of Philo is excellent, his discussion of Paul is disappointing. Part of the reason, I suggest, is because he contextualizes Paul’s thought on the law in a kingship paradigm instead of a freedom paradigm.


7. There is much literature on Paul’s exegesis of Exodus in this passage. Windisch (1924) first advocated the idea that 2 Cor. 3.7-18 is a midrash. Moreover, Dieter Georgi (1986) uses this idea to attempt to decipher the views and identity of Paul’s opponents, claiming that 2 Cor. 3.7-18 is Paul’s inversion of his opponents’ midrash.

8. Methodologically, I take seriously the comments of White (1990: 203) on the freedom paradigm: ‘only to mention a loaded term such as freedom is to call to mind a whole complex of associated ideas as part of the moral paradigm’. I take the appearance of the word ‘freedom’ in 2 Cor. 3.17 as the invocation of a paradigm that, when recognized, enables interpreters to understand the function of other present ideas in relation to that paradigm (e.g., ‘free speech’ in 2 Cor. 3.12).
Moral Freedom and Law in the Philosophical Traditions

Before the paradox that ‘every good man is free and every bad man is a slave’ became a hallmark of Stoic discussions around the first century BCE, the most influential philosophical treatment of slavery was Aristotle’s. According to Aristotle, slaves and freeborn men are different by nature from each other in body and soul (Pol. 1.2.7-15). It was this widely accepted notion, known as ‘natural slave theory’, with which later Stoic discourses would compete. Historically, it is difficult to trace the emergence of this Stoic paradox because of the state of the early Stoic sources. Yet, it is fair to say that in Stoic thought the combination of the proposition that nature created everything in a unified and systematic way and the deterministic principle that fate or providence is responsible for the events in a person’s life probably resulted in the gradual destabilization of natural slave theory from even the time of the early Stoics.

Putting aside the question of the early sources, the most extensive discussions of this paradox belong to Cicero, Dio Chrysostom, Epictetus and Philo. In his Paradoxa Stoicorum, the earliest of these sources, Cicero explains that wicked and foolish men are slaves, not in the legal sense, but because slavery means ‘the obedience of a broken and abject spirit that has no volition of its own’ (Para. Stoic. 35). In his Orations 14 and 15, Dio provides several examples of legally free persons who lack the ability to do as they wish—for instance, children, convicted criminals and students. In these discussions, desire and fear are thought to enslave, even in

9. Garmsey (1996: 15) argues that it was Aristotle’s natural slave theory that ‘reverberated down the ages’.
10. Even if, in rare cases, slaves appeared to have the bodies of freeborn men, Aristotle declared that they had different souls and were inherently subservient to feelings/sufferings (παθήματα) rather than reason (λόγος). On the imagined alterity of slave bodies and souls in the Graeco-Roman world, see Glancy 2002: esp. 9-38; Harrill 2006: esp. 37-44.
11. The problem is that sayings and ideas attributed to the early Stoics are often preserved only in later sources. E.g., Philo, Prob. 97; Diogenes Laertius 7.32-33, 121-122; Athenaeus, Deip. 267b; Seneca, Ben. 3.22.1.
12. On nature and fate in Stoic thought, see Long 1986: 147-78. On the dismantling of natural slave theory in the early Stoics, see Fitzgerald 2010: 154-62. It is important to recognize that the widespread relativization of slavery in the literature of the Roman imperial period seems to have had little influence on the institution of slavery. The circulation of such ideas would have in all likelihood urged the fair treatment of slaves considered good by their masters, but certainly would not have sought to end the institution itself. See Manning 1989; Garmsey 1996: 150.
13. For other, briefer treatments of the Stoic paradox, see Plutarch, Nob.; Seneca, Tranq. 10.3; Ep. 47; Ben. 3.17; Horace, Sat. 2.7.75-94.
14. Cicero gives the paradox in Greek and Latin (Para. Stoic. 33): ὁ μόνος ὁ σοφὸς ἐλεύθερος καὶ πᾶς ἁφρόν δοῦλος; Solum sapientem esse liberum et omnem stultum servum. For a Stoic source of the paradox likely earlier than Cicero, see Diogenes Laertius 7.121-22.
15. Dio defines ‘freedom as the knowledge of what is allowable and what is forbidden, and slavery as ignorance of what is allowed and what is not’ (Or. 14.18). On children, cf. Philo, Prob. 36; Gal. 4.1-6.
the absence of a human master. It is the man who lives by his own will, exalted by the virtues, that is proven free by truth and reason. Epictetus takes this line of thought the farthest by explicitly reversing natural slave theory in his Discourses.\(^\text{16}\) He describes freedom as something within a person by nature.\(^\text{17}\) Nevertheless, he is clear that a person must destroy desire and live by virtue to remain free.\(^\text{18}\)

It is perhaps not surprising that the evolving philosophical tradition focused on unwritten law (ἀγραφος νόμος), sometimes called natural law (νόμος φύσεως), intermittently coalesces with slave theory.\(^\text{19}\) From at least as early as Sophocles, authors referred to an unwritten law beyond what is known in written codes, a law reflecting the divine order of things, based on right reason (ἀρθος λόγος),\(^\text{20}\) and universally applicable.\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^\text{16}\) Although the Stoics at least entertained the idea in the Hellenistic period, it is fair to say that the notion that no human is by nature a slave had become commonplace by the first century CE. See Baldry 1965: 151-203; Manning 1989: 1518.

\(^\text{17}\) ‘Here, then, you see that there is something within you which is free by nature (φύσα)’ (Diss. 3.22.42). Like Dio, Epictetus understands freedom as the ability of a person to live as he wills (Diss. 4.1.1), under his own control (αὐτεξούσιον, Diss. 4.1.68). See Galloway 2004: 4-7, 57-102; Vollenweider 2013.

\(^\text{18}\) ‘[F]reedom is not acquired by satisfying yourself with what you desire, but by destroying your desire’ (Diss. 4.1.175).

\(^\text{19}\) Martens (1991b: 15; 2003: 1-12) has demonstrated that there are three distinguishable strands of classical thought on unwritten law: (1) laws literally not written in a code of law; (2) customs or social mores not technically considered laws; (3) ‘divine, or eternal law which was incumbent upon everyone, even though not written’. It is this third definition that is particularly important here, though it is often blended with the other two. I refer to the concept as unwritten law because not all authors used the term ‘natural law’, though many noted that following the unwritten law involves living according to nature (e.g., Aristotle, Rhet. 1.10.7). The terminological distinction is important because, as Helmut Koester (1968) observed, there is a contradiction between φύσα and νόμος in classical Greek thought: φύσα is the realm of natural things and events not ordered by human activity; νόμος is the realm of human laws, customs and activities. These terms are often used as foils for one another. For Koester, Philo invented the concept of natural law in order to support his belief that the Torah has universal applicability and his understanding of the Judaean God as Creator. While Koester is probably correct that the concept of natural law that has been so pervasive in Western history receives its foundational expression in Philo, the sources evince natural law as a pre-Philonic Stoic concept which has roots in philosophical traditions about the naturalness of unwritten law. See further Horsley 1978; Winston 1983: 381-88; Remus 1984: 5-18; Vander Waerdt 1994: 272-308; Defilippo and Mitsis 1994: 252-71; Najman 1999: 55-73; 2003a: 79-80; Martens 2003: 14-15, 18, 76, 85.

\(^\text{20}\) The term ἀρθος λόγος is an antecedent of natural law which Stoics used nearly synonymously with the latter concept by the time of Philo. For instance, Cicero declares that ‘True law is right reason in agreement with nature’ (Rep. 3.33). On Cicero’s Stoic conception of law, see Atkins 2013: esp. 155-87.

\(^\text{21}\) Sophocles, Ant. 450-51. Cf. Demosthenes, De cor. 274-75; Thucydides 5.105.1-2; Archytas of Tarmentum apud Stobaeus, Ecl. 4.1.132; Aristotle, Rhet. 1.10.7; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ant. 7.52; Cicero, Pro Milone 10.
The traditions about unwritten law are important in discussions of moral freedom because the very paradox that 'every good man is free and every bad man is a slave' depends on the postulation of a natural order deemed more important than written legal codes which prescribe slave statuses. Thus, freedom is often articulated as something acquired apart from written laws. For instance, Dio's interlocutor in Or. 14 concludes that a man who is free may do as he pleases so long as his action is not forbidden by the law. To this Dio retorts that there are things not forbidden by laws that are regarded as an affront to freedom—for instance, collecting taxes or keeping a brothel (Or. 14.14). Though he does not use the terms 'unwritten law' or 'natural law', Dio's understanding of freedom is evidently constrained by a moralizing notion of what it means to live according to nature—a natural code beyond written laws. Thus, a truly free man lives in accordance with the unwritten law.

In ideal situations, the written laws align with the unwritten law. However, in these cases, Cicero (Para. Stoic. 34) avers that a free man does not follow the laws because of fear, but because he judges them to be most conducive to health. Cicero is adamant, however, that civil laws do not contain everything in the natural law, and it is foolish to think that they do.

In sum, in Stoic discussions of slavery and freedom, the good or wise man is free because he does nothing by compulsion or against his will. If he follows the written laws, it is because they are in accordance with the divinely ordained unwritten law.

**Moral Freedom and the Mosaic Law: Philo’s Every Good Man is Free**

Philo’s Stoicizing treatise *Every Good Man is Free* (Prob.) is the companion volume to a lost work known as *Every Bad Man is a Slave*. While it is by no means the only place in his writings where Philo discusses moral freedom, it is his most comprehensive exposition on the subject.

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24. While Philo is often a good source for Stoic ideas, and especially in *Prob.*, he is really better described as a Middle Platonist who utilizes several diverse philosophical systems in the construction of his own. On the questions surrounding the identity of Philo as a Middle Platonist, incorporating Stoic thought into his philosophy, see the articles in *SPhilo* 5 (1993) as well as Dillon 1996: 114-83.
As with the other Stoic sources, in Prob. freedom is doing as one wills while slavery is being prevented from doing as one wills. Philo highlights virtuous pursuits and qualities of the free man such as friendship, self-mastery, endurance, humility, freedom of speech (παρρησία), one’s mind ruling his body, and being without anger, grief and fear. All of these things he considers to be aspects of a ‘life led agreeably to nature’ (160). For the Judaean exegete, this means that a free person naturally has no master other than God (19-20, 42). Thus, as in Paul, freedom is paradoxically akin to enslavement to God, and God alone.

The problem that Philo faces is that God’s law, the Torah, is written. As part of his discussion of freedom, Philo considered it necessary to demonstrate that the Torah was natural and promulgated freedom in spite of the notion that written laws are not necessarily agreeable to nature and the scriptural emphasis on the writtenness of the law as transmitted to Moses. This is how Philo treats the matter while describing Moses, the Judaean lawgiver, as a free man:

[...] those in whom anger or desire or any other passion, or even any insidious vice, has power, are by all means slaves, while those who live in accordance with the law are free. And right reason is an infallible law stamped (τυπωθείς) not by this mortal or that and, therefore, perishable as he, nor on parchment or blocks of stone, and, therefore, soulless as they, but by immortal nature on the immortal mind, never to perish. Wherefore, one may well wonder at the dim-sightedness of those who do not perceive the characteristics of things so clearly distinct and say that the laws of Solon and Lycurgus are self-sufficient (αύταρκεστάτους) to secure the freedom of the greatest of nations, Athens and Lacedaemon, because their citizens obey their authority, yet affirm that right reason, which is the fountain-head of all other laws, is not sufficient (ιαζόντος) to impart freedom on the wise, who obey all that it prescribes or forbids (Prob. 45-47).

Philo is suggesting that the Mosaic law is exceptional in its equivalence to the imperishable law of nature. In making this assertion, he constructs a rhetorical σύγκρισις (comparison) by casting the revered laws of Solon and Lycurgus as foils—that is, as examples of written laws that are not entirely sufficient to secure

26. Elsewhere Philo explicitly considers dominant the four traditional virtues of moral ethics: prudence, temperance, justice and courage. See Leg. 1.63; Cher. 6, 96; Sacr. 37, 54, 84; Deus 79; Sobr. 38; Abr. 219. See also his treatise De virtutibus.

27. Stanley K. Stowers (2003: 532) helpfully observes that Philo presents Judaism as a school of self-mastery, and the ‘Jewish Law as superior because it promotes self-mastery’ (i.e. the Stoic practice of bringing oneself into accord with reason by eliminating desires).


29. Cf. the notion of free person as friend of God in Epictetus, Diss. 4.3.9; Seneca, Prov. 5.6.

30. My translation.
freedom. Notably, he never claims that their laws were useless or antithetical to freedom; he only implies that they were not sufficient in themselves to ensure the freedom of the citizens of Athens and Sparta.

In his other writings, Philo is more transparent. The law of right reason which he equates with natural law is thought to be established by God at creation. Since God created the law of the cosmos and also revealed the Torah to Moses, it follows for Philo that the Torah must in no way contradict natural law. Indeed, for Philo even the pre-Sinaitic patriarchs of Genesis lived according to the unwritten law of nature later to be embodied in Torah. Therefore, even though the Torah is written, it comes from the same source as natural law, namely, God. According to the Life of Moses, when Moses recorded this law, he did not obscure it, but rather couched the divine orders in words of exhortation so as not to enforce adherence like the written laws of tyrants but to exhort free men to live in accordance with nature (Mos. 2.49-51; cf. Opif. 1.1-6). Thus, through a sophisticated subversion of the unwritten law tradition, Philo argued that the person who adheres to the Mosaic law is free and lives in accordance with nature.

31. Feldman (2005: 209-42) has demonstrated that the figure of Lycurgus as lawgiver is similarly important for Josephus in his depiction of Moses. On the importance of traditions about the Spartan law and way of life (self-mastery) for Judaean depictions of the Mosaic law, see also Stowers 1994: 62-64.

32. Martens 1991a: 317; Najman 2003a: 80. See especially Mos. 2.48: ‘he who would observe the laws will accept gladly the duty of following nature and live in accordance with the ordering of the universe’.


34. This has led Hindy Najman (1999: 72; 2003a: 81; 2003b: 54-63; cf. Bockmuehl 2000: 108) to label the Torah a ‘copy’ of the natural law in Philonic thought, but I do not think this description is quite precise. The term ‘copy’ (μίμημα) is frequently used by Philo and usually connotes inferiority (e.g., Mig. 440; Leg. 2.4). The description by Winston (1983: 381) seems more appropriate: ‘In Philo’s view, the Mosaic Law is no arbitrary set of decrees handed down from on high, but rather the truest reflection of the Logos which is embodied in the physical universe and constitutes its immanent natural law’. The language of embodiment and reflection is more appropriate, but perhaps the most precise terms for the relation between the Mosaic law and natural law are ‘stamp’, ‘mold’ or ‘impression’ (viz. τυπωθείς in Prob. 46; cf. Leg. 1.22; Opif. 1.6).

35. Philo’s pronounced interest in comparing Moses with other lawgivers and demonstrating that he is better than them because his laws are natural and not compulsory suggests to me that the Judaean exegete may be responding to outsider criticisms of Moses as an illegitimate lawgiver whose laws were compulsory and unnatural. For such criticisms, see, e.g., Josephus, C. Ap. 1.232-43, 248-50 (Manetho); 2.145 (Apollonius Molon, Lysimachus, and others); Tacitus, Hist. 5.4-5. On Graeco-Roman invectives against Moses and the Mosaic law, see Gager 1989: 80-133; Feldman and Reinhold 1996: 305-96.
Moral Freedom and the Mosaic Law: 2 Corinthians 3.1–4.6

In this section, I suggest that 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 evinces Paul’s shift of the scriptural freedom paradigm by means of engagement with the well-known Stoic traditions about freedom. Although I cannot offer here a full exposition of my views on the situation of the letter, a few words are in order. I regard 2 Cor. 1–7 as a letter of reconciliation sent by Paul after receiving news from Titus that the Corinthian believers had repented upon receipt of his previous, ‘painful letter’—that is, 2 Cor. 10–13.\\[36.\] I regard Paul’s opponents as the rival Judaean apostles of chs. 10–13, who preached another gospel (11.4) to the Corinthians and criticized Paul, claiming that he is unskilled in speech (10.10; 11.6), foolish, slave-like, weak, worldly, and does not have divine authority, yet boasts as if he does (10.13; 11.16-21; 13.3; passim).\\[38.\] Paul wrote chs. 1–7 to his primarily Gentile Corinthian churches in order to reconcile with them by reaffirming his authority for them in response to the claims of his opponents.\\[39.\]

36. The scholarship on the composition of 2 Corinthians is voluminous and diverse. Most scholars subscribe to a partition theory of the canonical text. Yet, scholars identify different fault lines, positing anywhere from two to six discrete letters therein. For a succinct survey of the different partition theories, see Mitchell 2005: 312-21. Cf. White 2004: 204-207. I largely follow White’s theory, according to which 2 Cor. 10–13 should be identified as the ‘painful letter’ mentioned in 2 Cor. 2.5-11 and 7.7-9; 2 Cor. 10–13 preceded 2 Cor. 1–7; 1–7 is regarded as a literary unity (regardless of whether the so-called ‘interpolation’ or ‘fragment’ of 6.14–7.1 had a prehistory before being incorporated into 1–7 by Paul).

37. I contend that there is only one group of opponents in view in 2 Cor. 10–13 and 2 Cor. 1–7. Furnish (1985: 50-54) has laid out ample support for this hypothesis. Cf. Georgi 1986: 27-40; Lidemann 1989: esp. 86-89.

38. Paul’s stilted irony regarding foolishness (άφρονα, etc.) and being reduced to slavery (καταδουλωθής) in 11.16-21 indicate that he thinks his opponents characterized him in this way. His employment of the freedom paradigm in 2 Cor. 1–7 may thus be viewed as a response to his opponents’ characterization of him in terms of moral slavery, as reflected in the painful letter. Peter Marshall (1987: esp. 323-25) similarly notes that Paul’s opponents cast him as servile and a flatterer (as opposed to a free person and friend).

39. Bruce Winter (2002: 141-239, esp. 221-28) has shown that Paul’s rhetorical debate with his opponents about authority in 2 Cor. 10–13, with its emphasis on speech (rhetoric), fits nicely within the context of sophistic debates over the sufficiency of orators taking place in first-century Corinth.

40. The importance of this observation for understanding 2 Cor. 3 as something other than an anti-Judaean polemic has been demonstrated by Gaston (1987: 151-68) and Duff (2004: 313-37).

41. On the paradigm of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians, see Fitzgerald 2001. While I do not concur with the conclusion of David Fredrickson (2001: 167) that the painful letter is lost, his argument that Paul’s defense of his παρρησία in 2 Cor. 1–7 is directly posed in response both to his critics and the forcefulness of his letter of tears is helpful.
The discrete subsection of 3.1–4.6 must be understood in this wider literary and situational context.42

**Paul Depicts Himself as a Free Man**

John Fitzgerald, in his *Cracks in an Earnest Vessel* (1988), has cogently demonstrated that Paul uses philosophical traditions in 2 Corinthians to depict himself as a sage, the ideal free man,43 not unlike that which he is well known for doing in 1 Cor. 9.44 However, this insight is rarely applied by scholars to 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6, despite the fact that this subsection continues Paul’s theme throughout the letter of presenting himself to the Corinthians as a worthy object of boasting. Whereas his opponents portray him as slave-like (11.16–20), he proclaims that his service is from God and for God. If we translate the διάκονος-words in terms of service instead of ministry, we see that Paul’s ongoing service among the Corinthians is, as Harold Attridge (2003) has shown in his analysis of the triumph metaphor in 2.14, akin to enslavement to the deity.45 Paul makes this especially clear in the

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42. It is often noted that 2 Cor. 3.7–18 is a poor fit in its context in the letter. This view is usually associated with Hans Windisch (1924: 112), who suggested that 3.7–18 could be removed from its present location without interrupting the argument of the surrounding letter. See also Schulz (1958: 11), who notes that there are several *hapax legomena* in this section. Contra such views, my reading casts 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6 as a discrete rhetorical unit within the cohesive letter comprising chs. 1–7 of the canonical text. While there may be *hapax legomena* in this section, there is also much lexical and thematic coherence with the rest of the letter. Consider, for instance, δόξα/δόξα (1.20; 3.7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18; 4.4, 6, 15, 17; 6.8); πρόσωπον (1.11; 2.10; 3.7, 13, 18; 4.6; 5.12); θάνατος/θάνατος/πανθήνεσις/θανατάω (1.9, 10; 2.16; 3.7; 4.11, 12; 5.4, 14, 15; 6.9; 7.3, 10); διαχονία/διαχονία (3.3, 6, 7, 8, 9; 4.1; 5.18; 6.3, 4); πνεύμα (1.22; 2.13; 3.3, 6, 8, 17, 18; 4.13; 5.5; 6.6; 7.1, 13); ἴκανος/ἵκανος (2.6, 16; 3.5, 6); παρρησία (3.12; 7.4); πεποίθησις/πείθω (1.9, 15; 3.4; 5.11). The unity between ch. 3 and the rest of the letter has been emphasized by, *inter alia*, Gaston (1987: 151–69) and Duff (2004).

43. See also White 2014: 221-50, in which he suggests that Paul in 2 Corinthians depicts himself as a sage who has mastered one of the cardinal passions, λύπη (e.g., 2.1-7; 7.8-11), just as Galen does in his *Peri Alupias*. Additionally, see now Concannon 2014, which includes an excellent analysis of Paul’s use of freedom language in order to compare himself to Moses. I thank Prof. Concannon for sharing proofs of his book with me in advance of publication.

44. See Paul’s self-designation as ‘slave of all’ in 1 Cor. 3.5; 9.19-23. Much work has been done on this Pauline motif with respect to 1 Cor. 9, but very little on 2 Corinthians (other than the studies of ‘free speech’ in 2 Corinthians). On freedom in 1 Cor. 9, see Marshall 1987: 285-306; Vollenweider 1989; Martin 1990: 117-35; Malherbe 1995: 231-55; Galloway 2004: 149-98.

45. Attridge provides a cogent and comprehensive reading of the metaphor: ‘On the level of the image, therefore, Paul portrays himself either as a devotee of the deity, like one of the women in the Isis procession described by Apuleius, or like a satyr in the ritualized “triumph” of Dionysus. It is in that sense, rather than in the sense of a captive being led to slaughter, that he is being “led in triumph”. He is indeed a slave to the triumphing deity, but a slave in his ongoing service …’ (2003: 71-88).
summation of this proof, in 4.5, when he presents himself and Timothy as slaves to the Corinthians on account of Jesus. Paul’s service, being commissioned by God, is a form of freedom.

While affirming that his commission is from God, Paul depicts himself through the use of freedom language. Most striking in this regard is his use of the ‘spirit on the hearts’ idea as a circumlocution for freedom. Like Philo’s logos-seeds, the spirit in 2 Corinthians is an unseen element of divinity implanted in humans. However, the first deposit of the spirit for Paul comes at baptism, as Troels Engberg-Pedersen has argued. Reappropriating the Jeremianic ‘writing on the heart’ tradition, Paul explains that writing on the heart means spirit inscribed on the heart, an idea he relates to freedom. He makes this clear in 3.17: ‘where the spirit of the Lord is, is freedom’. This is the key to understanding his claims about himself and the Corinthians elsewhere. For instance, he claims that God put the spirit in the hearts of him, Timothy and Silvanus as a guarantee of their divine commission (1.22). Similarly, he calls the Corinthians a ‘letter (επιστολή) of Christ … inscribed (εγγεγραμμένη) not with ink but with the spirit, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of fleshly hearts’ (3.3). In this way, Paul employs spirit language to portray himself and the Corinthian believers as having mutual freedom through the spirit.

46. Commentators tend to find this notion antithetical to Paul’s construction of his own authority (e.g., Furnish 1985: 223), but they overlook the consistent theme in 2 Cor. 1–7 that Paul serves God through his service to the churches (1.24; 2.14–15).

47. Note Paul’s use of ἀρραβώνα in 1.22 (cf. 2 Cor. 5.5). See Engberg-Pedersen 2010: 69-70. God continues to be active in humans through the spirit implanted on the hearts of believers. In 2 Cor. 1–7, Paul argues that physical suffering—his own and that of the believers—is not weakness because of the spirit of God in their hearts. For Philo, physical suffering is slavery only if a man is not in control of himself and his passions. If a man is in control of the passions, he is free. Thus, a major theme in each work is how to deal with fleshly limitations. In response to the accusation that he is weak, in this letter Paul affirms his strength through the spirit. It should be further noted that Paul’s understanding of spirit, while similar to the logos of Middle Platonism and Philo in particular, also draws on the roles and descriptions of Sophia in the Judaean wisdom tradition (e.g., Prov. 8.22-30; Sir. 24.3; Wis. 1.6-7; 7.22-8.1; 11.20; 12.1). However, even the concept of Sophia in the wisdom texts is often influenced by the Greek philosophical traditions. See Collins 1997: esp. 196-202.

48. See Jer. 17.1; 31.33; Prov. 3.3; 7.3. While I find the ‘midrashic’ use of prophetic texts in 2 Cor. 3 to be an imprecise and anachronistic description of Paul’s exegesis, I think that Hafemann (1995: 119-88) is otherwise correct to note a connection here between Paul’s heart language and prophetic texts that advocate reformed understandings of the Mosaic law in the context of a transformed heart. Consider, for instance, Jer. 31.33 and Ezek. 36.26. Paul’s employment of the scriptural ‘writing on the heart’ tradition explains his emphasis on hearts. Thus, in Paul’s particular use of language from the scriptural tradition, we see a blending of the scriptural and philosophical traditions on the divine law. Cf Rom. 3.29.

49. Because this line is part of Paul’s exegesis of the Exodus passage where χάρις is God, I contend that it also indicates God here, not Christ. See Furnish 1985: 211-12.
The apostle goes even further by using familiar freedom language in his self-depiction. In 3.12 he claims to make use of παρρησία—that is, free speech, one of the quintessential aspects of freedom.50 Similarly, in 3.4 he uses the conceptually related word πεποίθησις to boast of his confidence.51 Most significant, however, is his abundant use of the ικανός complex of terms in 3.4-6:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are self-sufficient (εαυτών ικανοί) to consider anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency (ίκανότης) is from God, who even made us sufficient (ίκάνωσεν) as servants of a new covenant, not of a written code (γράμματος), but of the spirit.

Following up on his question in 2.16 of who is sufficient to serve God, Paul’s answer is that he is sufficient because of his divine commission.52 This idea is especially interesting when compared with Prob. 47 in which Philo uses the same ικανός language to criticize the view that natural right reason is not sufficient for wise men, but that written laws are necessary. Philo thus argues that written laws are not sufficient to ensure freedom. As we have seen, his understanding of Torah as natural law makes an exception to this claim. However, Philo’s basic argument is the same as Paul’s here: God makes free, not written laws.

As a Free Man, Paul is not Restricted by Written Codes

In Philo and other philosophical sources, written codes of law are cast as insufficient for freedom. Since Paul is using the language of freedom here—ελευθερία, παρρησία, etc.—why should we be surprised that he argues that he is not constrained by written codes? In 3.4-6 Paul avers that his new covenant is of the spirit, not a written code—a γράμμα. This is how he continues his argument in 3.7-11:


51. The term πεποίθησις (‘confidence’, ‘boldness’) is very similar to παρρησία, though the latter is more often used with the valence of ‘free speech’. Both terms are hallmarks of freedom (and friendship), and, in Pauline thought, freedom as submission to God. The term here recalls the use of the cognate verb (πεποίθοτε) in 2 Cor. 1.9 and the other appearance of the noun in 1.15. Cf. 2 Cor. 5.11. See Fredrickson 1996: 178-79.

52. On the sufficiency motif, see Provence 1982: 54-81; Hafemann 1995: 39-188.
But if the service of death, engraved in letters (ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη) on stones, came in glory so that the Israelites were not able to gaze at the face of Moses on account of the glory of his face being nullified, how will the service of the spirit not be in more glory? ... For if that which is being nullified was through glory, that which remains is in much more glory.

It is only at this point that Paul introduces the Mosaic law as a written code that does not restrict his freedom. When Paul speaks of γράμμα, he means written code abstractly, of which the Mosaic law is an example. We need not assume, as Dieter Georgi, Lloyd Gaston and others have argued, that γράμμα refers here to the heavenly texts and ministry of Paul’s opponents. If that were the case, how are we to understand his use of the same term in Rom. 2.27, for instance, where Paul says to his interlocutor, ‘Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code (γράμματος) and circumcision but break the law’? Γράμμα and νόμος are different entities for Paul, who demands that one follows the law without keeping the written code.

This raises important questions about 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6. Does Paul ever say that the γράμμα is worthless or invalid? Does anything in this passage indicate that he does not follow the Mosaic written code? No is the response to both questions. To his Gentile audience here Paul only says that the written code is insufficient. Interestingly, Philo would agree, which is why he adamantly argues that Torah is also natural law. Moreover, this is an a minori ad maius argument. Paul’s claim that his covenant in the spirit has surpassing glory is built upon the assumption that the Mosaic written code has glory. Whereas texts depend on humans to write them, Paul’s spirit code is a permanent (τὸ μένον, 3.11) inscrip-

53. The word καταργούμενη, which I have translated as ‘being nullified’ here, refers to the glory of the διακονία of Moses, not the covenant of Moses or the Mosaic law as such. As Timothy Luckritz Marquis (2013: 105) notes, this verb means “to render idle’ or ‘to make ineffective’, in the sense of ‘nullifying’ the binding effects of a contract’.

54. Georgi 1986: 137-48; Gaston 1987: 157. Γράμμα has a range of meanings in ancient sources, but it usually denotes something written by a human. It does often refer to the scriptures in Judaean and Christian sources, but typically in the introduction of a scriptural quotation. We need not assume that Paul means γράμμα as a Pauline circumlocution for the plural ‘holy scriptures’ here, contra Ernst Käsemann (1971: 143). Especially in 3.6, Paul seems to understand γράμμα as ‘written code’ generally, of which the Torah is one example. Paul poses the Decalogue, and then Torah, as written codes, but he never explicitly labels them as such. Cf. Rom. 2.27, 29; 7.6. It is also noteworthy that Philo uses the term (γράμματα) in a similar way in Prob. 104 (cf. 158), where he argues that written title-deeds that legally prescribe slave statuses do not actually indicate whether one is a slave. Interestingly, even when Philo uses this word to describe the Torah in Spec. 1.31, he is arguing that these writings are eternal because the life that the Torah prescribes is recorded on the pillars of nature.

55. Rom. 3.31 is instructive in this regard: νόμον οὐκ ἴστρογομέν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; μὴ γένοιτο ἄπαντος νόμον ἰστάμονος. Cf. Gal. 3.17.

tion on hearts. This is an argument about the nature of law codes, not their contents or validity. Just as Philo and Cicero never said that written codes were useless or wrong—in fact, they both said nearly the opposite—neither does Paul.

Moses and the Mosaic Law are Cast as Foils for Paul and his Gospel

In a letter written to Gentile Christ-believers that, unlike Galatians, seems to have little or no concern with the so-called matter of Judaizing,57 for what reason does Paul include an argument citing Moses and his written code? Many scholars have attempted to seek, or rather generate, an explanation in the doctrines of Paul’s opponents. It is claimed that they exalted Moses as a ‘divine man’, carried heavenly texts, and propounded an allegorical hermeneutic.58 None of these conjectural explanations is necessary. Paul employs the authority of Moses as a foil for his own authority, and the mediation of the Mosaic law—not the law itself—as a foil for the mediation of his gospel.59 Contrary to most scholarship, the Judaeans and the Torah are not Paul’s concern here.

Paul employs σύγκρισις to compare his commission with that of Moses in 3.12–4.6. In 3.13 he observes that Moses veiled his revelation when he delivered it to the people. Unlike Philo,60 Paul emphasizes the veil as Moses’ human mediation of the divine will. As Paul goes on to indicate in 3.15, ‘whenever Moses is

57. It was Windisch (1924: 23-26) who first popularized the Judaizers hypothesis. Georgi, in The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians (1986), famously argued on the basis of 2 Cor. 3 that Paul’s opponents were Hellenistic-Jewish itinerant teachers of wisdom who proclaimed that Moses was a divine man. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (1991: 13-15, passim) similarly claimed that Paul’s opponents were from an Alexandrian tradition of Hellenistic Judaism. Cf. Lüdemann 1989: esp. 92-97. Variations of these theories are prevalent in scholarship on 2 Corinthians. The only considerable evidence that I recognize for the idea that the opponents were Judaizing is 11.22 (Ἐβραίοι εἰσίν; κάγῳ, Ἰσραήλ τί πάντα εἰσίν; κάγῳ, σπέρμα Αβραάμ εἰσίν; κάγῳ); however, I think Paul’s main point is 11.23 (διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν εἰσίν; ...ὑπέρ ἐγώ). Furthermore, Paul similarly emphasizes such credentials of his for a Gentile audience in Phil. 3.5-6. One should not read the type of polemic against Judaizers in Paul’s rhetoric in Gal. 2.13-17 into other passages in which a Judaizing issue cannot otherwise be amply supported. These are Paul’s unique credentials to preach the gospel as he does. I do not consider the Judaizers hypothesis impossible; I simply note that it cannot be confirmed on the basis of the fragments of 2 Corinthians. See also the cautions of Mitchell (2005: 314-17) in this regard.

58. Gaston (1987: 167), for instance, argues that Paul’s opponents preached ‘a rank allegorical interpretation of the type that even Philo, master of the art, would have to reprove’.


60. Interestingly, Philo does not mention Moses’ veil, but rather focuses on the Israelites’ inability to look at Moses’ bright, sun-like (divine) countenance. See Mos. 2.70, which I read together with Deu 1.77-79. In the latter text, Philo explains that a mortal cannot stare into the sun because it is a heavenly work of God. This is part of a larger a fortiori argument in which Philo underscores the power of God by demonstrating that humans cannot perceive it because of their mortal nature.
read, a veil lies over their heart'. This verse rehashes Paul's emphasis that the spirit is in the hearts of the believers.61 Presenting itself as the entirety of God's law, the Torah has been filtered through the mediation of Moses, who veiled and wrote, and thus is limited. The person who follows only the Mosaic law is restricted by a humanly mediated law code, and is therefore a slave according to the Stoic paradox.

Paul proceeds to support his argument through a keen exegetical insight. He transforms Exod. 34.34, 'but whenever Moses would enter before the Lord to speak to him, he would take away the veil' (ἡνίκα δὲ ἐν εἰσεπορεύετο Μωυσῆς ἐνάντι κυρίου λαλεῖν αὐτῷ περιηγείτο τὸ κάλυμμα), by democratizing it in 2 Cor. 3.16: 'but whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away' (ἡνίκα δὲ ἐὰν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα).62 In view of the previous verses, it is clear that Paul has removed Moses from the quotation in order to say that the veil would be removed by any person who turns to the Lord instead of only to the Mosaic law.

In 4.1-6, Paul leaves no doubt that the example of Mosaic mediation was staged as a foil for his own mediation of the gospel. He says that, 'even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing, among whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unfaithful lest they see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (4.3-4). Paul sets up this rhetorical concession in order to acknowledge that he appears to be a mediator just like Moses and just like his opponents. In response to this potential objection, Paul takes himself out of the equation and places the emphasis on the direct connection of the believers to Christ, and thereby to God. The believers who accept this gospel turn to the Lord by letting the light in their hearts—that is, the spirit—illuminate 'the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (4.6), that component of divine revelation veiled by Moses and lacking in the written law.63

61. This verse clarifies that what is at stake here is the Torah, not just the Decalogue. Importantly, the 'Old Testament' is not envisioned here. 'Moses' served as a circumlocution for the Torah by the late second Temple period. E.g., Paul cites Leviticus and Deuteronomy under the name of 'Moses' in Rom. 10.5 and 10.19. Cf. Tob. 6.13; 7.11; Lk. 16.29, 31; 24.27.

62. It is difficult to make sense of Paul's quotation without assuming a τις governing ἐπιστρέψῃ (Furnish 1985: 211). The changes to the Exodus text are enumerated by Windisch (1924: 123).

63. Living in accordance with God—or, freedom—in Pauline thought is to have eternal life through the resurrection made possible for Gentiles by the Christ-event. The Christ-event in Pauline thought corresponds to reason in Stoic philosophy because it allows a person to have the spirit implanted within them (like the divine logos-seeds), which thereby connects them with other believers in a community of individuals. See Engberg-Pedersen 2000: 33-44. Allusions to the Christ-event enter Paul’s argument more explicitly in 2 Cor. 4.4-6, 10-11, 14; 5.11-21.
Conclusion: Implications for Paul’s Understanding of the Mosaic Law

Even though Paul’s argument in 3.1–4.6 is decidedly Paulo-centric, we can glean important information about the apostle’s understanding of the law from this pericope. Most importantly, Paul depicts the Mosaic law to his Gentile audience as insufficient for freedom, much like he does in Gal. 3.15–4.7 and Rom. 5–8. It is noteworthy that he uses the writtenness of the Mosaic law as a reason to critique the law’s relevance, given that other philosophers of his day did likewise. One would be hard pressed to find two men who affirm the importance of their respective laws more vehemently than Philo and Cicero, yet both of them utilize the theme of moral freedom to open up a hermeneutical space from which to critique written laws according to their particular understandings of the virtuous life. Paul does the same thing in his letters. He critiques the Mosaic law in its relevance to Gentiles, but not with regard to Judaeans.

In 2 Cor. 3.1–4.6, Paul claims that the Mosaic written code brought condemnation to Gentiles (3.9).64 From the time of the law-giving on Sinai to the Christ-event, the law brought condemnation to Gentiles, but not to Judaeans. Moses’ veil represents the concealment of divine revelation as it pertains to Gentiles. Through Christ, Moses’ veil is removed for Gentiles, revealing their inclusion in God’s plan. However, if Gentiles read the Mosaic law (3.15), regardless of the edification and instruction it may provide, it remains veiled for them. As part of his self-depiction, Paul employs moral freedom language to imply that Gentiles should not seek freedom through the Mosaic written code; but this is not an outright rejection of the contents or validity of the Mosaic law, as is evident in Paul’s recapitulation of many of its precepts.65

How, then, are we to understand Paul’s depiction of the law in 2 Corinthians? I propose that we view Paul’s critique of Mosaic mediation on a spectrum with other texts that participate in what Hindy Najman calls ‘Mosaic discourse’.66 Najman (2003a: 16-17) uses this term to refer to a text that reworks and expands older traditions, ascribes to itself the status of Torah, re-presents the Sinai experience, and authorizes its new interpretation as divine revelation associated with Moses. While Mosaic discourse is epitomized by texts like Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, Najman also sees Philo as participating in Mosaic discourse, albeit in a qualified way since he distinguishes between ‘Mosaic Scripture’ and his own interpretations (2003a: 107). While Paul does not attempt to portray his gospel as Torah, he does return to Sinai and reconfigure that Mosaic discursive

64. This was a frequent theme in Second Temple literature. See Duff 2004: 321-26.
65. E.g., 1 Cor. 5.13; 9.8-9; 10.6-11; 14.21; 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1. See Tomson 1990; Blanton 2012: 65-66.
tradition in order to legitimate his claim that his gospel to the Gentiles was always part of divine revelation, but was concealed by Moses. Paul discursively hinges the authority of his gospel and his commission on the figure of Moses, simultaneously affirming and trumping Mosaic authority. For this reason, Paul could be said to participate in Mosaic discourse in an even more qualified way than Philo. Like other authors who engage in Mosaic discourse, Paul’s gospel seems as if it could replace the Torah for Gentiles, but in fact it is best viewed as an extension of the Torah which derives its authority in relation to it through Mosaic discourse. Especially for Judaeans, but also for Gentiles, Paul’s is not a ‘law-free’ gospel insofar as that implies a categorical eschewal of Torah.

As Webb Keane (2007) has compellingly argued, the contemporary Western understanding of freedom is a defining feature of Christian modernity which exalts liberation from the material world as part of a moral narrative of progress. In Pauline studies, a field haunted by specters of Hegelian dialectics, freedom is traditionally viewed as a Christian ideal of emancipation from Judaism and its material law, enabled by the immaterial spirit, as part of a divine plan for human liberation. I suggest that once we remove this totalizing veil of Christian modernity from our historical reading of these Judaean letters, we discover a more complicated moral concept of freedom, not as an ideal of agency devoid of determinism, nor of progress in terms of ontological liberation from Judaism and its law. Rather, one finds an ideal of freedom from the contingency of the Mosaic written code for Gentiles that is not a total abrogation of the law and is not strictly dematerializing, for it imagines freedom through the material spirit as inscribed on fleshly hearts, and as inscribed through Paul’s gospel.

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