CHAPTER FIVE

LOGOS AND DESIRE

A few lines prior to the mention of the implanted 
logos in Jas 1:21,
reference is made to a “logos of truth” (λόγος ἀληθείας) through which
God “gave birth to us, so that we are a sort of ‘first fruits’ of his
creatures” (Jas 1:18). This statement has been seen by some inter­
preters as providing decisive confirmation that the logos that, accord­
ing to James, “saves souls” is in fact “the Gospel.”

The expression λόγος ἀληθείας is found in several other works of
the Christian canon, differing only in case or in the use of a definite
article: 2 Cor 6:7 (λόγῳ ἀληθείας), Col 1:5 (τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας),
Eph 1:13 (τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας) and 2 Tim 2:15 (τὸν λόγον τῆς
ἀληθείας). Colossians and Ephesians use this phrase with explicit ref­
erence to “the Gospel” (τῷ εὐαγγέλιον), and such an identification is
also clearly implied in 2 Timothy. 3 Joseph Mayor concluded from
this collection of passages that the phrase λόγος ἀληθείας was “a
vox technica of early Christianity,” 4 but this conclusion overstates
the evidence. It is to be noted in the first place that all of the latter
references appear in pauline or pseudo-pauline writings; one should
be cautious in making generalizing conclusions regarding “early

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1 See Chapter One.
2 No great weight should be placed on the lack of the definite article in identi­
fying the referent of the λόγος ἀληθείας of Jas 1:18. As will be argued below, and
as virtually all agree, it is the same λόγος as that described in 1:21 as ὁ ἐμφυτὸς λόγος.
Compare in this respect the inconsistent use of the definite article in connection
with νόμος in James: see 1:25; 2:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; and 4:11.
3 Note that just after ps.-Paul’s words of encouragement to “Timothy” to be “a
worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining τῶν λόγων τῆς ἀληθείας”
(2:15), he refers to those “who have swerved from τὴν ἀληθείαν by claiming that
the resurrection has already taken place” (2:18). This implies that the “right” ex­
planation of τῶν λόγων τῆς ἀληθείας entails a proper understanding of the resurrection;
and this resurrection lies at the heart of “the gospel” of which ps.-Paul himself
claims to be a “teacher” (1:11), and of which he, too, is “not ashamed” (1:12, ὁκὺ ἐπαινε­
γέοντος); see 2:8, and cf. 1:8–14.
4 Mayor cites several other passages in the course of his discussion of the phrase
λόγος ἀληθείας, but it is apparently these which he has in mind when he refers to
“the N.T. quotations” which show that “λόγος ἀληθείας is a vox technica”; see St.
James, 63.
Christianity” on the basis of evidence found in this limited corpus. Indeed, analogous phrases do occur in other Jewish and Christian literature with different meanings.\(^5\) Even within the pauline literature itself, in fact, the extent to which we are dealing with a univocal “technical term” is far from clear. That Paul uses the phrase in 2 Cor 6:7—its only occurrence in the undoubted letters of Paul—with reference to the gospel is by no means obvious. Found among a list of attributes that, Paul says, characterize his ministry (including, among other things, the fact that he has acted with kindness, patience and “genuine love”), the phrase might well be understood more generally as connoting “truthful speech.”\(^6\) Moreover, the association of ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀληθείας with “the gospel” in both Colossians and Ephesians falsely inflates the evidence for the fixity of this expression, for in this case the similarity is most likely to be explained by literary dependence, not independent attestation of a pauline, much less an early Christian, “technical term.”\(^7\)

The strong impression that this assembly of passages might at first create is significantly tempered through these considerations, and

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\(^5\) Spitta had already pointed to LXX Ps 118:43, a passage which is often understood with reference to the law; see Laws, James, 76; also Johnson, Letter of James, 198. Particularly interesting for our purposes is Clement of Alexandria, Strom 1.13, where the phrase is used in connection with a concept somewhat reminiscent of Justin’s logos theory: “Since, therefore, truth (τῆς ἀληθείας) is one... just as the Bacchantes tore asunder the limbs of Pentheus, so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaunts as the whole truth (τὴν ἀληθείαν) the portion which has fallen to its lot. But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth (τὰ λόγηδος) — both those who possess not a little, and those who have any portion—produce whatever they have of the word of truth (τὸν τῆς ἀληθείας λόγον)” (text in MPG 8.753–56; translation in ANF 2.313). Cf. also T. Gad 3:1; Odes Sol. 8:8; Philo, Somn. 1.23.

\(^6\) So the NRSV. Such a more general claim of honest and straightforward speech would, of course, include Paul’s preaching of “the gospel”; the question, however, is whether the phrase λόγος ἀληθείας referred only and specifically to the latter. Note in this connection Paul’s need to address the Corinthians’ evident dissatisfaction with his apparently vacillating travel plans (2 Cor 1:15–2:17); see esp. 2 Cor 1:18, ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν ὁ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ous ἐστιν ναι καὶ ous. Cf. in this respect the use of the phrase ἐν λόγω ἀληθείας with a more general reference to speech in Ps. Sol. 16:10; see further the λόγον ἀληθείας of LXX Ps 118:43, in which, too, there is some ambiguity. It should not be forgotten, in this connection, that the phrase λόγος ἀληθείας does not appear elsewhere in any of the undisputed letters of Paul.

\(^7\) For a concise sketch of the problem of the relation of Ephesians to Colossians, see R. Schnackenburg, Ephesians: A Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 30–33. Note also Tsuji’s suggestion that the very fact that the “word of truth” is explicitly identified as “the gospel” in these works suggests that the two were not obviously synonymous (Glaube, 68).