

Martin Luther's Legacy on English Translations of Paul¹ Romans 1:16—17 Once Again

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Suppose one man to rely on his own faith and another to rely on his own works, then the faith of the one and the works of the other are equally the same worthless filthy rags.²

Another title for this chapter could be: “The Good News is *What God Does, Not What I Do*”. And the message in these words is true even when “what I do” is the act of *believing* or *trusting*. The title given, though, remains and is intended to be both a tribute to, and a criticism of, Martin Luther.

The reformation inaugurated by Luther made an enormous impact on Christianity, and his own understanding of Paul, evidenced in great measure by his commentary on Romans, has had an immense influence on Western Christianity, including the Catholic Church from which he came. It is his remarkable impact, however, that has led, in part, to a serious misunderstanding of the apostle Paul's major teaching on πίστις (the noun meaning “faith” and “faithfulness”).

The discussion must begin with what Luther wrote in his commentary on Romans, particularly 1:16-17. His strong emphasis on righteousness coming

¹ Submitted in honor of Hans K. LaRondelle, a friend and colleague since 1967 when we both began teaching at Andrews University. Three passages from Romans and Galatians are examined.

² William Law, cited by A. G. Hebert in “Faithfulness’ and ‘Faith,’” *Theology* 58 (1955) 379 and also, via Hebert, by Richard B. Hays in his published doctoral dissertation: *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1—4:11*, SBLDS 56, The Society of Biblical Literature (1983), and recently republished by Eerdmann's with additional material, (2002) 119.

solely from God, that there is no room whatsoever for the Christian to talk about his/her righteousness, is an indisputable and powerful message. Luther made it very clear: My righteousness amounts to zero.³

So, what does the statement mean, “The righteous man shall live by faith”? In this statement a man can be righteous. But, that righteousness is “by faith,” not in the keeping of the law, but in what the person believes about God’s righteousness. “What a person believes,” then, becomes the central theological issue for Luther. And it is this “central issue” for Luther where the difficulty begins.

In his noble effort to stress the importance of having faith in order to obtain this divine righteousness, over against a man who attempts to become righteous by his works,⁴ Luther effectively shifted the emphasis of Paul’s gospel definition, probably unknowingly, from God’s / Christ’s *faithfulness*⁵ to a believer’s *faith*.

Many important studies have been done in English⁶ in the last fifty years that argue for the translation of πίστις as “faithfulness” instead of “faith” in certain key Pauline passages.⁷ At the same time, a few New Testament scholars have strongly defended the translations that coincide with Luther’s understanding.⁸

³ Eloquently argued repeatedly in his commentary on Romans. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. 1976.

⁴ See the Stendahl reference in footnote 10.

⁵ The debate over whether Paul is referring to God’s faithfulness / Jesus Christ’s faithfulness, or both, in different passages, is a secondary issue for this study. In this chapter the issue is over whether or not Paul is referring to the faithfulness either of God / of Christ or to human faith. For Paul, God’s faithfulness and Christ’s faithfulness are essentially the same, the latter being evidence of the former.

⁶ Earlier studies were done in German and cited in the articles given in the next footnote.

⁷ In English, the first major articles I am aware of are those of A. G. Hebert and T. F. Torrance in 1955 and 1957, respectively. Hebert, *Ibid.*, 373-379 and Torrance, “One Aspect of the Biblical Concept of Faith,” *Expository Times* 68 (1957) 111-114. The most thorough and carefully developed work on the topic is Richard B. Hays’ work referred to in footnote 2. The number of NT scholars who have been in dialogue on the topic is enormous, and I mention here two articles that

What I offer in this essay are both some new suggestions and a look at some of the existing arguments in favor of using “faithfulness” for πίστις in several key Pauline passages.⁹

My own interest in the topic stems from a controversial article I read in the 1960s, an article that opened the door for me to seeing the possibilities discussed in this chapter.

Krister Stendahl’s provocative essay, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” written over 40 years ago, persuasively

contain numerous references to positions taken on both sides of the issue since those early studies done in the 1950s, referred to above: Douglas A. Campbell “Romans 1:17—A *Cruce Interpretum* for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994) 265-285, and Charles L. Quarles, “From Faith to Faith: a Fresh Examination of the Prepositional series in Romans 1:17,” *Novum Testamentum* 155 (2003) 1-21. Recent commentaries include the issue and several are cited below.

⁸ James Barr. *The Semantics of Biblical language*. London: Oxford University Press (1961), 161-205). Hays gives an evaluation of Barr’s response to Hebert and Torrance, in which Barr is credited with showing the flaws in Hebert’s and Torrance’s work, but not in overturning the major point of their arguments. 140, 145-147. Glenn N. Davies in his *Faith and Obedience in Romans: a Study in Romans 1—4*. Sheffield: JSOT (1990) has a similar evaluation: “The criticisms of Barr on the force of Hebrew words behind Paul’s use of πίστις and πιστεύω are sound. However, Barr’s criticisms...do not affect the case for the subjective genitive,” 107, fn 1.

John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1959 and 1965. vol. 1, 363-374. These pages are Appendix B. There are a number of serious flaws in Murray’s comments. To mention two: 1. He argues that because we do indeed have verses where it is clear that πίστις means “faith in...” (objective genitive), we can proceed to essentially make all genitives objective even when some passages could also be subjective genitives. To so reason could lead to the opposite and equally fallacious argument where, for example, in Rom. 3:3 the construction is definitely subjective, as all translations show, “Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness” (πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ). Obviously, this clear example of a subjective genitive does not serve to suggest, therefore, that all genitives in this construct must be subjective. 2. In a similar way of reasoning, he sights six non-Pauline passages containing πίστις in which the genitives are objective as another confirmation that the Pauline constructions need to be the same.

⁹ I acknowledge at the outset that I have not covered all the literature available on the topic for this chapter. My research and writing during the past 35 years have been primarily involved with New Testament textual criticism and thus, I have not, unfortunately, kept up with the scholarly activity occurring on this topic. Given this involvement with textual criticism, it has been indeed gratifying, while preparing this chapter, to find support for views I have been sharing in the classroom for several decades. A student asked me after class a few years ago if I was acquainted with Richard B. Hays’s book. He said, based on my class lecture, that I would really appreciate his book. How true his comment proved to be! Nevertheless, I need to make it clear that I still have not covered all of the excellent material in print. This accounts for some footnotes that refer to a work second-hand.

argued that the great reformer, Martin Luther, did not comprehend Paul's central message on the concept of faith.¹⁰ Stendahl wrote that Luther found in Paul's citation of Hab. 2:4, "ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται" ("The one who is righteous will live by faith"¹¹) a solution for his plagued conscience. Well and good, except for the fact that Paul was not writing his letters to the Romans and Galatians to deal with a guilt-ridden conscience.¹²

Stendahl, himself a Lutheran, points out that Paul actually had a very healthy conscience ("robust conscience"—to use his words),¹³ and was quoting Habbakuk to make his case that Gentiles did not have to first become Jews before becoming Christians.¹⁴

Once Martin Luther experienced release from his plagued and burdened conscience by internalizing Paul's citation of Hab. 2:4 (The just live by faith), in which he came to realize that all of the "works" he was doing would never make him righteous, the good news of Paul's gospel about *what God does* shifted to *what a believer does* devoid of works.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Harvard Theological Review*, 56 (1963) 199-215. This article is also included in a collection of essays by Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, Fortress Press, 1976. Strong reactions to this essay have been written, especially from renowned German scholars. But after a fresh reading of the essay, I remain convinced that Stendahl's basic argument is sound, and that the opposition to Stendahl's thesis merely proves how powerful Luther's influence has been.

¹¹ The New Revised Standard Version (NRS) is used for all English translations unless otherwise indicated.

¹² Stendahl, 210.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁴ Surely a view supported by all NT scholars today. See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*. Dallas, Word Books (1988), 40, 43 and esp. 46-49.

¹⁵ Most explicitly stated in Luther's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. 1976. Mueller, in his excellent translation of Luther, wrote the following in his preface to the 1954 edition, showing that he himself understood Luther to have made this position of the believer prominent: "[Luther] gradually came to a clear knowledge of the central teaching of Scripture, the doctrine of justification by grace *through faith in Jesus Christ*" (emphasis supplied), 1. "Through faith in Jesus Christ" clearly puts the emphasis on what the believer does: He has "faith in Jesus Christ."

This essay does not intend to state in any way that Luther's misunderstanding of Paul's teaching on πίστις seriously diminishes the value of the Luther's writings on the subject. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that Luther's *emphasis on a person* being righteous on the basis of faith (versus works) has contributed to numerous inaccuracies in English translations of Romans and Galatians.¹⁶

The alternative emphasis, either missed or consciously rejected by Luther, is that πίστις, can be translated "faithfulness," in much the same way the Hebrew word אֱמוּנָה can often be translated.¹⁷ A translation influenced by the Old Testament places the emphasis *on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ or God*.

Mistranslations of πίστις

The importance of the Greek word πίστις for English translations is immediately recognized when we observe that there are three basic definitions with significant variations: "faith," "faithfulness" and "trust." It is the definition selected by translators, along with syntactical judgments, that reshape Pauline theology, referred to above.

Before we examine the most important and controversial passage on the topic, Romans 1:17, we first look at two passages that illustrate most obviously

¹⁶ I believe this is true for many translations in the other letters of Paul, but confine the study to two letters for the obvious reason.

¹⁷ In his 1951 book, *Two Types of Faith*, Martin Buber argued that Paul was the founder of Christianity (following Wrede) and did so by Hellenizing the Hebrew concept of trust and faithfulness. For Buber, πίστις and אֱמוּנָה were worlds apart. While one applauds Buber's assessment of Jesus as being a genuine Jewish prophet, his conclusions about Paul were influenced by the History of Religions School and devoid of significant studies on the Jesus / Paul debate. Trans. by Norman P. Goldhawk. NY: Collier Books, 1986 (reprint of 1951 edition).

the bias found in the English translations: Romans 3:22 and Galatians 3:22.

These two verses should open the door for allowing alternate translations in other Pauline passages on the subject of faith, faithfulness, belief and trust.¹⁸

In both verses, the translators' partiality is evident by their translation of Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive. Using the word "faith" for πίστewς makes it possible to hide an obvious redundancy.¹⁹ First, Romans 3:22:

^{UBS} ...δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντα τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

^{NRS} ...the righteousness of God through **faith in Jesus Christ** for all who believe. (emphasis supplied)

Luther made Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ an objective genitive: through *faith in Jesus Christ*.²⁰ As evident, the NRS makes this an objective genitive. And, apart from the King James Version, all English translations I checked read the same as the NRS,²¹ That is, "Jesus Christ" is the object of the faith (διὰ πίστewς) of a *person*. The alternative translation would read: "through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." This makes Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ a subjective genitive—Jesus Christ is the

¹⁸ The word πίστις occurs 62 times in Romans and Galatians, and it is not possible to report in this chapter the results of my examination of these 62 places. I would invite the reader, however, to look at these places with one objective in mind: what happens if either "trust" or "faithfulness" is substituted for "faith"? The results will prove very rewarding. I intend to share my own observations in a future publication.

¹⁹ This redundancy is recognized by others. For example, Richard N. Longenecker. I am in full agreement with Longenecker who, in his chapter for the Leon L. Morris *Festschrift*, mentions, in addition to the two verses under discussion, other Pauline passages where πίστις should be a subjective genitive to avoid redundancy: Gal. 2:16, Phil. 3:9, and Eph. 3:12. He suggests that this is probably also the case for Rom. 1:17 and 2 Tim. 3:15, "The Obedience of Christ in the Theology of the Early Church" in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology* (presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday), 147. Robert Banks, ed. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974. See also Hays, 142.

²⁰ Commenting on Rom. 3:22, Luther wrote. "Righteousness for justification is given to us only through 'faith in Jesus Christ' (emphasis supplied)," *Romans*, 77."

²¹ ESV, NAB, NAS, ANU, NEB, NIB, NIV, NJB, NKJ, NLT, NRS, RSV, NTBE, Confraternity, Goodspeed and Phillips. The KJV reading is: "faith of Jesus Christ"—which is discussed in the next paragraph.

subject of πιστις, *it is his faithfulness*, not my faith. What is Paul's emphasis, my faith or Jesus' faithfulness?

First, though, we need to deal with the reading found in the King James Version, "the faith of Jesus Christ."²² This translation allows the genitive to be either subjective or objective. It is unlikely, however, that the KJV translators intended the subjective genitive, for in such a case the "faith of Jesus" would mean "Jesus' own believing. This does not make sense for Pauline theology is not Jesus' own ability to believe,²³ but about Jesus' faithfulness, and therefore, the KJV should no doubt be added to the other English translations we checked, and translated as an objective genitive.

Looking at Romans 3:22 again, we ask: What does "faith in Jesus" mean (the translation that uses the syntax of the objective genitive)? The word "faith" in "faith in Jesus" means to either "believe" or "trust" in him. That being the case, let us substitute the word "believe" for "faith." The substitution clearly shows the purposelessness of an objective genitive translation. The passage would then be saying that "...through **believing** in Jesus Christ to all who **believe** [in Jesus Christ]..." As noted above, the use of "faith" in Jesus rather than its equivalent "believing" in Jesus, serves only to hide the bias of the translators, and it is difficult to understand how this could occur.

The second example, Galatians 3:22, has precisely the same poor translation, but with an additional translation problem:

²² What we write here applies to the Confraternity Version for Gal. 3:22, where "faith of Jesus Christ" is also rendered.

²³ If we use the word "trust," however, we would have a Fourth Gospel view of Jesus.

^{UBS} ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως **Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ** δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

^{NRS} But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised **through faith in Jesus Christ** might be given to those who believe.

Again, the NRS makes Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ an objective genitive: *through faith in Jesus Christ*.²⁴ As we did for Romans 3:22, when we substitute the word ‘believe’ for ‘faith,’ we see the meaninglessness of the statement, namely, “...what was promised through **believing** in Jesus Christ might be given to those who **believe** [in Jesus Christ]...” Substituting “trusting” and “trust” here would still amount to redundancy.²⁵

But the translation here is even more flawed because the preposition in the Greek is ἐκ, not δία, as the English translations used for this study erroneously indicate. These English translations, reflected in the NRS reading, take away the basic meaning of the Greek, which in itself is a clear example of Luther’s influence on English translations. The Greek preposition ἐκ simply does not mean “through.”²⁶ English translators are so engrossed with the act of the *believer* (rather than on the acts of *Jesus Christ* or *God*), that they actually ignore the basic meaning of the Greek. This surely is to be attributed to Luther’s and other reformers’ emphasis, whether conscious of it or not.

²⁴ Except for the Confraternity Version, the same English versions cited for Romans 3:22 give the same translation, “faith in Jesus Christ.” The Confraternity Version has “faith of Jesus Christ,” and what we wrote above about this translation of the KJV for Romans 3:22 applies here.

²⁵ See also Hays, 142. He argues also that πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in this verse in Galatians is “the source or ground out of which the promise is given to those who believe,” 148.

²⁶ The Greek preposition conveys the meanings of separation and origin, etc. Never does “ἐκ” mean “through.” See any Greek lexicon. The translators reveal their theological position, noble as it may be, to be influenced by the reformers, not by either the natural reading of the Greek nor by an understanding of Paul’s basic message.

Πίστις as Faithfulness Romans 1:16—17

The pivotal passage in this debate over definitions on the word πίστις (“faith” or “faithfulness”) is Romans 1:17 where Paul makes his concluding remarks on his *definition of the good news*.²⁷ The emphasis given by the italicized words are intended to draw attention to Paul’s own orientation, for Paul’s definition is completely centered on what God does, particularly through God’s faithfulness, evidenced in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.²⁸ This point is developed below under Paul’s understanding of God as found in his bible—our Old Testament.

^{UBS} Romans 1:17 δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

^{NRS} For in it [the gospel] the **righteousness of God is revealed** through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

The debate centers around two clauses, and we give attention to both:

1. ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν
2. ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

A. ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν.

Luther’s German translation is: “aus Glauben in Glauben.”²⁹ In his commentary, he wrote:

The words “from faith to faith” have been interpreted in various ways. Some explain them thus: From the faith of the Fathers of the Old

²⁷ All NT scholars I am aware of indicate that this verse along with the preceding verse, are the key verses, the theme verses, for all of Romans.

²⁸ The issue of whose faithfulness is involved, God’s or Jesus Christ’s, is entirely secondary to the major issue of interpretation: Paul’s message or Luther’s understanding of Paul. See footnote 5.

²⁹ *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift*. Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1964.

Testament to the faith of the New Testament. This exposition may be accepted, though also it may be contested; for the righteous do not live by faith of past generations, but, as it is written, “The just shall live by (his) faith.” The Fathers believed the same Gospel we have; for **there is but one faith**,... The words evidently mean: **The righteousness of God comes altogether from faith**, but in such a way that there appear constant growth and constant greater clarity.”³⁰

All English translations I checked³¹ follow Luther in the use the word “faith” for πίστewς and in some form or another essentially say that the entire clause is related to God’s righteousness being revealed in “one faith,”³² namely *what a person does*, not in *what God does*. That is, both forms of πίστις in this clause refer to a person, not to God or Christ.

In Romans 1:16,17, Paul is talking about his definition of the good news, which in *every single clause is about what God does*. To use some sort of notion that the clause (ἐκ πίστewς εἰς πίστιν) is all about *my faith* growing (faith added to faith / faith to faith / faith for faith / faith from first to last, etc.)³³ when the context is about the good news of what God does is altering the natural flow of the passage. Furthermore, it not only ignores the immediate context, it overlooks the entire thrust of Paul’s pastoral objective.³⁴

Note the previous verse, Romans 1:16:

³⁰ Luther, *Romans*, 41. Emphasis supplied.

³¹ These English translations are those mentioned above and all translate πιστέwς as the faith/belief of the believer.

³² Luther’s words. It is interesting that although Quarles traces the interpretations found among the church fathers, he does not mention Luther, “Faith to Faith,” 2-3. Did Quarles leave out Luther’s views because Luther rejected the view Quarles ends up defending?

³³ Other renderings include: “based on faith and addressed to faith”—NJB; “start to finish by faith”—NLT; and “process begun and continued by their [men] faith”—Phillips.

³⁴ Paul’s letters are pastoral in nature. He is not writing theological essays. Obviously theology is present in his letters, but it is a theology that emerges from a historical setting, and that setting is pastoral. Paul must be identified with his world, and not the world of the reformers or that of our own!

^{UBS} Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.

^{NRS} For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The definition of the good news (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) in Romans 1:16-17

contains the following vital points about what God does, first from verse 16:

1. The good news is about *God's power to save*
2. This power, God's, can save everyone who *trusts* (in God) both Jew and Gentile

We then add the first part of verse 17 to this definition:

3. In it [the gospel] the *righteousness of God* is revealed.

It is clear, at this point in the two verses, that the good news is centered entirely on what God does, not on what the believer does. The next two words, ἐκ πίστεως, need to retain this emphasis on the good news of what God does, and therefore be translated “out of (his) faithfulness.”

Douglas A. Campbell made an effective argument on the meaning of the clause: ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν. Building on the important contributions of Richard B. Hays and Glenn N Davies, Campbell makes two key points we wish to mention: (1) Paul's position is that the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) is already revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται—present passive) in the gospel³⁵—the “in it” (ἐν αὐτῷ) is understood by all translators and interpreters to refer to the gospel.

³⁵ *Cruix*, 272. 275-277. Glenn N. Davies made this point a few years earlier. He wrote in a footnote: “The present tense of ἀποκαλύπτεται stresses the ongoing dynamics of the application of God's righteousness...” *Faith and Obedience*, 43, fn 2.

And (2), since God's righteousness is already revealed, God's righteousness does not, therefore, depend on a person's acceptance to be revealed,³⁶ (be that acceptance called faith, belief or trust). That is, God's righteousness is not dependent on a person's faith³⁷ since his righteousness is already revealed in the gospel, namely, through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, and this is central to Paul's main point.³⁸

Why does a cosmic eschatological reading of v.17a exclude an interpretation of ἐκ πίστεως in terms of anthropocentric faith? If Paul is saying that "the eschatological, saving righteousness of God is being revealed within the gospel," then clearly this event is accomplished independently of the individual's faith.³⁹

Campbell further notes that Paul's use of the verb ἀποκαλύπτω strengthens the idea that this revelation is about *what God does*. One of his examples is taken from Gal. 1:15-16 where Paul refers to God's revelation (ἀποκαλύπτω) to him to take the good news to the Gentiles, and does not even mention Paul's "faith"⁴⁰ to which I add, for clarification on his point, this mission account does not mention *the need for Paul to respond / believe!* This leaves the emphasis on *what God does*, not even on what the apostle Paul does.

Quarles, in an important study, examined the construction ἐκ + A + εἰς + A (where "A" is a substantive repeated) in Paul, the LXX and 340 non-biblical sources from Homer to 600 A.D. and essentially eliminated the option of an

³⁶ I would add at this point, that all English translations indicate that God's righteousness is *dependent* on the "believer" in the sense that if the person does not in fact believe, God's righteousness cannot be revealed. Campbell is arguing, correctly, that it is already being revealed, and this is completely separate from what a person might choose to do.

³⁷ *Crux*, 272-3. Davies also wrote: "For it is not human faith that reveals God's righteousness, but God's faithfulness in the fulfillment of his salvific purposes for Jew and Gentile alike," 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

objective genitive. He states: “The prepositions [ἐκ and εἰς] retain their common senses and express source and result respectively.”⁴¹

What is particularly significant in his study is that he narrowed the options for ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν to two, namely, the revelation of God’s righteousness (1) “originates in his faithfulness and results in the faith of the believer,” or (2) “extends from the faith of the Old Testament believer to the faith of the New Testament believer”—the view proposed by Chrysostom.⁴² Even though he concluded that view number 2 was the preferred interpretation, he did, nevertheless, provide a strong case for the reading that favors the construction to be a subjective genitive.

The Old Testament Case. Another point on this debate relates to Paul’s bible, the Old Testament. We get an inkling of what was in Paul’s mind with the expression ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν by examining parallel expressions in the Old Testament on the subject of righteousness and faith (δικαιοσύνη and πίστις).

New Testament scholarship is in general agreement that Paul’s basic orientation was Hebrew, not Greek.⁴³ That being the case, the evidence given in Old Testament passages depicting the characteristics of God in numerous ways and repeatedly stated, must influence our understanding of Paul’s own writings. We mention here two Old Testament verses Paul no doubt was thoroughly

⁴¹ Quarles, 12.

⁴² He wrote: “The balance of the evidence tips in favor of Chrysostom’s view,” 21. Interestingly, although Luther believed Chrysostom’s interpretation had merit (he did not mention Chrysostom, only the view), he rejected it. *Romans*, 41.

⁴³ This viewpoint has become dominant particularly since W.D. Davies’ book, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, London: S.P.C.K., 2nd ed., 1955; 3rd ed., 1970.

familiar with. In these two passages the Hebrew words אֱמוּנָה (faithfulness) and צְדָקָה (righteousness) are found in Hebrew parallelism.⁴⁴

1. ^{NRS} **Isaiah 11:5** *Righteousness* shall be the belt around his waist, and *faithfulness* the belt around his loins.

וְהָיָה צְדָקָה אֲזוּר מִתְּנִי וְהָאֱמוּנָה אֲזוּר חֻלְצִי׃ ^{WTT} Isaiah 11:5

2. ^{NRS} **Psalms 143:1** <A Psalm of David.> Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your *faithfulness*; answer me in your *righteousness*.

אֶל־תִּחְנוּנֵי בְּאֵמֶנתְךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּצְדָקֶתְךָ׃ ^{WTT} Psalm 143:1

These two passages show that in the Hebrew mind, God's righteousness is a synonym for God's faithfulness. What Paul wrote in Romans 1:17 preserves this Hebraic parallel.

Furthermore, it is not stating too much to point out that in Paul's thinking, the concepts of steadfast love (חֶסֶד) and faithfulness (אֱמוּנָה) are attributes of God that cannot be separated. The words are often combined, either in parallelism or with a conjunction.⁴⁵ The Hebrew word חֶסֶד embraces the characteristics of אֱמוּנָה, namely, loyalty and stability and frequently also appears also with צְדָקָה in Hebrew parallelism.⁴⁶ These powerful Old Testament terms

about God, known inside-out by Paul, make statements about God that in no way

⁴⁴ The number of OT passages where these two words occur in Hebrew parallels in Psalms alone is indeed impressive. To mention some examples (that include אֱמוּנָה): ref. from English: Psa. 40:10; 85:10; 85:11; 89:14; 95:13; 96:13; 118:75; 119:75; and 119:142.

⁴⁵ Including אֱמוּנָה, from Psalms: 26:3; 57:10; 85:10; 85:11; 89:2; 89:33; 89:49; 92:2; 100:5 and 108:4. These words also often occur side by side in Psalms: 25:10; 40:10 and 11; 57:3; 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 88:11; 89:14 and 24 and 98:3.

⁴⁶ Including אֱמוּנָה, from Psalms: 85:10 and 11; 89:14 and 103:17.

whatsoever would have been ignored in Paul's thinking—this is his understanding of salvation 100 percent, and it begins and ends with who God is and what he does!

The emphasis we find in English translations today portrays a theological view of Paul's message that is entirely out of harmony with his concept of God, a concept that centers around three oft-repeated words: righteousness, faithfulness and steadfast love.⁴⁷ Paul's mind would have been saturated with these terms. It is inconceivable that someone living in Paul's time with Paul's background would have read Romans 1:17 the way Martin Luther and all of his successors have.⁴⁸

One More Consideration: The immediate context.⁴⁹ An additional parallelism is found within the immediate context. In verses 17 and 18, Paul states that both the revelation of God's righteousness and the revelation of God's

⁴⁷ And all one needs to do to recapture Paul's message is to do some very basic Old Testament word studies. Such a study, with all presuppositions laid aside, would indeed be revealing.

⁴⁸ The reasons given by Dunn for translating ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν as faithfulness that leads to faith are excellent. They are as follows:

- (1) "In both written and spoken media, where there is a word with a double meaning, it is universally recognized to be characteristic of good style to play on that double meaning."
- (2) "Following a verb like 'reveal' the ἐκ is more naturally to be understood as denoting the source of the revelation (cf. 1:18; 2 Thess 1:7) and the εἰς as denoting that to which the revelation is directed."
- (3) "To take both the ἐκ and the εἰς as referring to man's appropriation of God's righteousness is somewhat odd." [Repeats point in number 2]
- (4) The Hab. quotation "is probably intended by Paul to be understood with an ambiguity which embraces both God's faithfulness and man's faith" [Here I would substitute "man's faith" with "man's faithfulness," based on Romans 4].
- (5) Ref to Rom. 3:3 as next mention of πίστις and it refers to God's faithfulness.
- (6) God's faithfulness, as a theme in Romans and part of the theme of God's righteousness, is obscured by the fact that the Hebrew word אֱמֻנָה is often translated as ἀλήθεια instead of πίστις [in the LXX]
- (7) "The righteousness of God can be defined quite accurately as 'God's covenant-faithfulness'"—referring to Kasemann.

⁴⁹ Some important points on the connection between verses 17 and 18 are given by Davies, 43-46.

wrath *have a divine origin* and move toward the named recipients: those who trust and those who are ungodly, respectively.

1. Righteousness of God is revealed---from Jesus' faithfulness (**divine origin**)—for persons who trust (verse 17).

2. Wrath of God is revealed---from heaven (**divine origin**) for persons who are ungodly (verse 18).

Paul was stating, then, in Romans 1:17 in English: “In it [the gospel] the *righteousness* of God is revealed out of his / Christ's *faithfulness*⁵⁰ which leads to a person's ability to trust.” As noted above, the words *righteousness* and *faithfulness* are synonyms for Paul, and both neatly tie into his definition of the gospel being what God does!

We now turn to the second part of Paul's definition of the good news, the last part of Rom. 1:17, the quotation from Hab. 2:4: ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

⁵⁰ See footnote 5 on these choices.

B. ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

The attempts to figure out just what Paul was intending to state, especially since his “it is written” (γεγράφται) quotation does not correspond to either the preserved LXX or MT readings, and even a fourth rendition is found in Hebrews.⁵¹

We mention first the major options in the original languages with the possible English translations given in brackets. Then, a proposed solution is given. It is important to note all of the possibilities for the original words and not draw a conclusion based on previous readings or understandings.

First, the English of the NRS and then the Hebrew and Greek.

- ^{NRS} **Habakkuk 2:4** The righteous live by their faith.
- MT יְחִיֶּה בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יְצִדִּיק [The righteous one shall live by his faith/faithfulness/trust]
- LXX ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται [The righteous one shall live by my faithfulness]
- Paul ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. Rom. 1:17 and Gal. 3:11 [The righteous one shall live by faith/faithfulness/trust—with no reference to whether or not these terms apply to God or man]]
- Heb. ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.⁵² Heb. 10:38 [My righteous one out of faith/faithfulness/trust shall live]

We are immediately faced with at least two major difficulties. One, which of the original languages is preferred, if such is called for?⁵³ Two, what is the

⁵¹ Hays, citing Lindars' *NT Apologetic*, 231, points out that the reading of Hebrews is in two uncials (ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου) is probably due to the attempt to assimilate the Greek to the Hebrew, 139.

⁵²
⁵³ Scholars have generally insisted on one possibility or another. A much better solution is given below.

correct translation, since the words ἐκ πίστεως can refer to both the “righteous” and the verb, “shall live”?

Here, I turn to the explanation given by James Dunn. My view coincides with his view 100 percent. Here are his key points. (1) There are positive aspects for both readings of Hab. 2:4, namely, there is a considerable amount of evidence that the passage in Hab. supports the idea that the righteous man is one who is a faithful member of the covenant—reading of the MT⁵⁴ and, for the LXX reading, in that Paul would not have had difficulty with the LXX reading: “Individual righteousness is the product of God’s fidelity to his obligations to mankind...”⁵⁵

(2) Paul’s choice to drop the personal pronouns (his / my) “was probably, in part at least, prompted by a desire both to avoid choosing between the two different renderings and to embrace both forms.”⁵⁶ (3) Paul, following the rules of interpretation of his time would have chosen a reading that would “*extend* and broaden the meaning...” Dunn refers to H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 93-94. The rules of interpretation in Pharisaic circles of Paul’s time “were designed to draw out as much meaning as possible from the text,”⁵⁷ not

⁵⁴ Dunn, 45

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Dunn’s following argument deserves repeating. “It is unlikely that Paul in dictating these words was unaware of the two alternative renderings of the text—“by *his* faith(fullness)” and “by *my*(=God’s) faith(fullness).” Nor is it likely that he removed or ignored the possessive pronouns (“his” “my”) with a view to persuading his addressees to take the verse in a wholly new and unexpected way. Had he entertained such an intention we would have expected a clearer formulation of the Habakkuk quotation, whereas in fact his quotation is so ambiguous that commentators have never been able to agree on how it should be read. The point which has usually been missed is that Paul’s citation is *deliberately* ambiguous. That is to say, Paul does not want to give Hab. 2:4 a new sense and to do so by *excluding* the alternative understandings; if so he made a bad job of it. Rather he wants to read as *much meaning* into the verse as possible—just what we would expect a Jewish exegete, especially a Pharisee, to do with a text of Scripture. In other words, the “from faith” is probably intended by Paul to be read as including the sense of the LXX (“from God’s faith”), and so as providing the proof text for the “from faith” (from

restrict the text, as we in the Western world are trained to do. One and only one meaning for a word or expression. This would be foreign to Paul's world.

The importance of this last point cannot be overemphasized. Repeatedly Paul's use of the OT text reflects this rabbinical concept of expanding and even reshaping—sometimes to merely make use of the language when there is no rational connection by Western ways of reasoning.⁵⁸

Making the Case for “Faithfulness”⁵⁹ The Importance of Romans 4.

The passage in Romans that amplifies the meaning of Paul's gospel (Rom. 1:16-17) and the meaning of ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν is Romans 4.⁶⁰ We see in Romans 4 in the clearest terms that the good news is centered on what God does. But more, we see how God and man relate to one another within the gospel—the “faithfulness” / “faith” issue of Rom. 1:17.

In the words: Abraham *trusted*,⁶¹ and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,⁶² Paul ties together the relationship between God's faithfulness and the believer's trust (Rom. 4:18-22).⁶³ My comments are given in brackets:

God's faithfulness) in the preceding line (cf. 3:3). But most probably he also intended it to be read as including the sense of the phrase “to faith” as well; that is, the righteousness of God revealed to faith (cf. 3:21-22),” 48.

⁵⁸ A good example, Paul's use of Isaiah 28:11-12 in 1 Corinthians 14: 21 on the failure of tongues for unbelieving Israel. Examples of rabbinic methods are abundant. The examples from Matthew's gospel are numerous, especially in his “fulfillment” prophecies containing references to Hosea, Jeremiah, etc., in which the historical context is totally ignored, but nevertheless was an acceptable exegetical practice for first century rabbinical exegetes.

⁵⁹ For the Greek word πίστις, rather than restricting it to “faith” in which ambiguity is prominent and the door is opened to misleading translations—the burden of this essay.

⁶⁰ With all of the excellent exegesis comments made on these verses in Romans 4, I am surprised that Paul's words in these verses are not tied to Romans 1:16-17, particularly since the language and theology are so parallel.

⁶¹ The use of the word “trusted” instead of “believed” is supported by both the context of Romans and by what happened in Abraham's life. “Trust” is a relational experience (that is, more than an intellectual stance, “believing” is a word that often misses the relational aspect. As James states, even “The devils believe....”

Rom. 4:18 Hoping against hope, he believed [trusted God] that he [Abraham] would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said [by God in the Genesis accounts], "So numerous shall your descendants be."¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith [his trust] when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.²⁰ No distrust [excellent choice] made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith [trust] as **he gave glory to God,**²¹ being fully convinced that **God was able to do what he had promised.**²² Therefore his faith [his trust made it possible for him to accept the fact that God could be trusted and would do exactly what he said he would do] "was reckoned to him as righteousness."

It was Abraham's acknowledgement of *what God could do*, not what Abraham himself, even with Sarah's and Hagar's help, could do, that led Paul to make this statement about Abraham's righteousness.

Belief on its own (the mental acceptance of God's promise) was insufficient as evidenced by Abraham's initial *belief* in what God offered him regarding the large number of his offspring. This "belief" led him to take things into his own hands, and with the approval of Sarah, he married Hagar. Abraham concluded that he himself was going to have to do something to make God's promise work. No trust here, and his act of doing things on his own did not make Abraham a "righteous" man.

About 15 years later, during which time Abraham became better acquainted with God, and he realized the promise would not be fulfilled by efforts on his part, he was able to acknowledge that the answer resided with God, not him and Sarah. So, at the age of 100, Abraham had a trust in God's promise that

⁶² Paul makes this statement, with variations, four times (Rom. 4:3 and 9; Gal. 3:6 and 9).

⁶³ The brevity of Luther's comments on this passage, as well as the depth of the content, is another indication he was reading Paul with his own agenda. *Romans*, 85-87.

would not waver as he looked at his own body and the barrenness of Sarah, for he knew that *God was able to do all that he promised!*

It seems to me that as long as English translations maintain the orientation of the reformation, we will continue to miss the strength of Paul's good news. We may even miss the best argument there is against Luther's misunderstanding of James.⁶⁴

Let Paul be a mid first-century pastor in his world, not in the world of the reformers or the modern western world. For all worlds, past, present and future, the good news is good news for everyone. Paul wanted to say that being a child of Abraham does not depend on genealogical records or in possessing the Law, because *the good news is good news even before a person ever becomes involved*. And the good news remains good news even if a person rejects it. To use Paul's words, My unfaithfulness does not make God unfaithful.⁶⁵ **God is always faithful**, and as such, members of the human race, without a single distinction, can be counted as a child of God.

⁶⁴ This is a WHO versus WHAT issue. What Luther missed on the question of works was that Paul's definition of works was really about "**who**" a person was, Jew or Gentile, whereas James was concerned about works that were defined by "**what**" I do. Had Luther realized this, he would have recognized that Paul and James were on the same page. The misunderstanding comes down to this: Works for Paul was Who you are versus James' What you do. And on these distinctions, Paul and James were in agreement, Luther was unable to discern this because he looked at the texts from his own perspective, a natural reaction, and a lesson for us.....

⁶⁵ UBS Rom. 3:3 τί γάρ; εἰ ἠπίστησάν τινες, μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ [subjective genitive!] καταργήσῃ;⁶⁵ NRS What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the **faithfulness of God**? Of course not!

This was Paul's message, and English translations should make that message plain, for his message should be ours: To God be the glory, great things he has done.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ This is a frequently stated conviction of early Christianity that coincides with Paul. Luke often remarks the recalling of the mighty works of God: Luke 8:39 and 9:10; Acts 14:27 and 15:4, 12.