

“God’s Righteousness Is Revealed in Every Believer from Faith to Faithfulness” (Rom 1.17): A Possible Reading

The Bible Translator

2021, Vol. 72(1) 99–116

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DOI: 10.1177/2051677020983500

journals.sagepub.com/home/tbt



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Abstract

This study proposes understanding Rom 1.17 as: “For God’s righteousness is revealed in every believer from faith to faithfulness, as it was written, ‘The righteous will live by faith,’” based on various exegetical considerations in both its syntagmatic and literary context and its role in the overall shape of Romans. It highlights Paul’s holistic and dynamic picture of Christian life in which justification by faith produces its fruits in a believer’s everyday life.

Keywords

Romans 1.17, thematic movement in Romans, God’s righteousness, justification by faith, sanctification

Introduction

One of the goals of the traditional historical-grammatical criticism of the New Testament has been to investigate and explore the authors’ intended meanings of their texts and how their first readers may have understood them. Romans is one of the most well-studied of Paul’s writings. In this study, I offer a possible reading of Rom 1.17, based on various exegetical grounds with respect to its syntagmatic and literary context and its role in the overall shape of Romans. This study resonates with what D. A. Cruse calls “a variety of ‘contextual’ approach”; he states that “it is assumed that

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the semantic properties of a lexical item are fully reflected in appropriate aspects of the relations it contracts with actual and potential contexts” (1986, 1). Moisés Silva emphasizes the importance of context in determining the meanings of words, and mentions four criteria: (1) syntagmatic sense relations; (2) literary context; (3) context of situation; and (4) other levels of context (1994, 137–48).

When discerning the meanings of various words and phrases in Rom 1.17, this study focuses on Silva’s first two criteria. In proposing a new reading of Rom 1.17, I discuss various exegetical issues related to the verse. It is possible to criticize this approach as being too selective, or not having a clear and consistent methodology. But the key insights of this study came to me when I was teaching a Greek exegesis course on Romans. It did not originate from a particular research interest but from trying to understand Rom 1.17 better in the light of Paul’s thematic movement in the whole letter.

“God’s righteousness”

Paul uses the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ seven times in Romans (1.17; 3.5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10.3). Colin G. Kruse identifies five different aspects of the word δικαιοσύνη throughout Romans: (1) distributive justice (1.18–32; 2.2–11; 3.1–20); (2) covenant faithfulness (3.3–9; 9.1–29; 11.1–10); (3) saving action (3.21–26); (4) the gift of justification and a right relationship (3.21–26; 4.1–25; 5.17; 9.30–10.4); and (5) the righteousness of life (6.1–23; 8.4) (Kruse 2012, 79–81). Following Ernst Käsemann (1969), Kruse contends that the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (1.17) carries the sense of (3) saving action (a subjective genitive) and the sense of (4) the gift of justification and a right relationship (a genitive of source/origin).

Paul uses the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ with multiple senses. Concerning its central meaning, Käsemann states, “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is for Paul, as it is for the Old Testament and Judaism in general, a phrase expressing divine activity, treating not of the self-subsistent, but of the self-revealing God” (1969, 174). However, as Mark A. Seifrid notes, in Rom 1.16–17:

It is unlikely that Paul assumed that his audience was familiar with the background to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ which Käsemann suggests. If Paul’s addressees had been familiar with a tradition in which the idea of “God’s saving and obedience-producing power” was expressed by δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, there would have been no need for the argument of Rom 6. (Seifrid 1992, 44)

First, we must consider the phrase’s most typical sense.¹ As Denny Burk argues, “Because δικαιοσύνη is the nominalization of an attribute, we have

¹ I have in mind here what Dirk Geeraerts (2010, 183–203) calls “the prototype model of category structure” in cognitive semantics.

to rule out of bounds any notion of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as a subjective or objective genitive” (2012, 346). The nominalized form of the verb δικαίωω is not δικαιοσύνη but δικαίωσις.² The abstract noun δικαιοσύνη is derived from the adjective δίκαιος. Therefore, the genitive θεοῦ is an adjectival genitive or an ablative genitive, rather than a verbal genitive. I concur with Burk that the genitive θεοῦ should be identified as an adjectival genitive (i.e., possessive genitive), not as a verbal (subjective or objective) genitive. If Burk is right here, strictly speaking, the most typical and obvious sense of the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is that θεὸς ἐστὶν δίκαιος (“God is righteous”) rather than θεὸς δικαιοῖ (“God justifies”).

However, Burk concedes that:

Käsemann’s interpretation is still possible even when rendering the phrase as a simple possessive genitive—God’s own righteousness. When the phrase is interpreted as a possessive genitive, *righteousness* at its root is an attribute of the divine nature that can stand metonymically for God’s redemptive work through Christ. (2012, 346)

While Käsemann’s interpretation is still possible, as Burk emphasizes at first, the genitive θεοῦ is not a verbal genitive. Frank Thielman correctly captures the most typical sense of the phrase:

It not only refers to God’s saving activity and to the gift of acquittal from sin before God on the basis of faith, but, from the perspective of its first readers and hearers in Rome, would have referred most obviously to a property of God’s character, that he is fair, even-handed, and equitable in the way he distributes salvation. (Thielman 2011, 35)

Paul writes in Rom 3.26, “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”³ While the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (Rom 1.17) refers both to God’s saving activity and God’s gift of righteousness based on faith in the light of Rom 3.26, its most typical sense is “God is righteous,” or “God is right.”⁴

“In every believer”

Virtually all English translations of Rom 1.17 identify the personal pronoun αὐτῷ with the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in v. 16 (e.g., CJB, ESV, GNB,

² Burk is not saying here that the verb δικαίωω and the adjective δίκαιος are not related to each other semantically. Burk first seeks the morphological root of the noun δικαιοσύνη, as he seeks its most typical sense.

³ I use ESV as my primary English translation of the Scriptures, unless I provide my own.

⁴ The so-called “New Perspective on Paul” has pushed for the view of God’s righteousness as God’s covenant faithfulness, as in Wright 2013, which goes beyond the scope of this study; I hope to engage with it elsewhere; cf. Omanson (2004, 339–48).

NET, NIV, NJB, NLT). Perhaps the only exception is Eugene Peterson's *The Message* ("God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: 'The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives'"). However, the personal pronoun αὐτῷ can be either masculine or neuter dative singular. There is a certain poetic parallelism in Rom 1.16-17:

Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον,

δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε
πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι.

δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν,
καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

The coordinating conjunction γάρ appears three times here. Some may argue that the poetic parallelism of Rom 1.16-17 suggests that the antecedent of the personal pronoun αὐτῷ in v. 17 is the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in v. 16. The stronger poetic parallelism here is not between the first and the third γάρ but between the second and the third γάρ. What strikingly and immediately parallels the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in v. 17 is not the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον but the phrase δύναμις θεοῦ in v. 16. As God's power causes the salvation of everyone who believes, God's righteousness causes a movement in every believer's life from faith in Jesus Christ to continuing Christ-like obedience to God.

I am not saying here that the conventional English translations of Rom 1.17 are incorrect, but am proposing a possible reading that highlights Paul's holistic and dynamic portrait of Christian life. This reading identifies the personal pronoun αὐτῷ with the phrase παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι rather than the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, for the former is the closest possible antecedent and it makes better sense of Paul's citation of LXX Hab 2.4, by which he shapes his words in Rom 1.17.

Dietrich-Alex Koch (1985) claims that the LXX reading ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται (W* B S Q V) of Hab 2.4 is original, containing the possessive adjective μου, and that Paul intentionally dropped the μου for his own rhetorical purpose. As Chris Kugler argues, "if there was still any doubt concerning the source of Paul's formation, the fact that ἐκ πίστεως occurs only in Romans and Galatians—the very letters alone that cite Habakkuk 2.4—is decisive evidence for this conclusion" (Kugler 2016, 251; cf. Campbell 1992, 100, and Hays 1997, 42). The phrase ἐκ πίστεώς μου "by my faith" in LXX Hab 2.4 contrasts with the phrase בְּאֵמוּנָתוֹ "by his faith" in MT Hab 2.4. Kugler comments on Paul's citation of LXX Hab 2.4 in Rom 1.17:

As Campbell has suggested, Paul has taken this expression from Habakkuk, and excised the pronoun in either MT or LXX, because he wants to relate this

πίστις to Jesus Christ (Campbell 1994, 268). Essentially, Paul has taken a text which read something like, “ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ” (Campbell 1994, 268). Hence, Paul has taken an expression from the Jewish Scriptures which, when related to a genitive pronoun of person, is always subjective, and he has brought that formation in relation to Jesus Christ. (Kugler 2016, 252)

Though it goes beyond the scope of this study to delve into the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, I want to respond briefly to Kugler’s comments on Rom 1.17. Kugler seems to argue that Paul refers to the faithfulness of Christ (subjective genitive) by the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in his citation of LXX Hab 2.4 in Rom 1.17. This makes little sense in its syntagmatic and literary context. If Kugler is correct, according to a conventional English translation such as ESV, Paul writes, “as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by [the] faithfulness [of Jesus Christ],’” which would have made his first readers wonder what that meant specifically. While both the objective genitive reading and the subjective genitive reading make good sense for the phrase διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας in Rom 3.21-22, Kugler’s argument for the subjective genitive reading in Rom 1.17 is unconvincing.

As I will explain shortly, Paul more likely refers not to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (subjective genitive) but to every believer’s faith in Jesus Christ (objective genitive) and his or her continuing Christ-like obedience to God. The faithfulness of Jesus Christ makes one’s faith in him possible as its foundation, and Paul does not isolate the latter from the former. As Robert Jewett suggests, Paul may have altered the text “to make plain to his audience that faith refers to acceptance of the gospel” (2006, 144).

Paul uses the identical phrase ἐκ πίστεως and an abstract noun δικαιοσύνη derived from the adjective δίκαιος in LXX Hab 2.4. In conventional English translations, it is not immediately clear how “the gospel” or “the righteousness of God” is linked to “the righteous one” in LXX Hab 2.4 and why Paul cites this particular Scripture as his supporting text. My new reading of Rom 1.17 makes better sense of why Paul quotes LXX Hab 2.4. Paul perceives that everyone who is not ashamed of the gospel but experiences the power of God that leads him or her to salvation fulfills this prophecy in Habakkuk. Rikki E. Watts explains how the question of God’s righteousness and wicked Gentiles in Hab 2.4 “provides Paul an opportunity to establish that his gospel and its problematic outworkings are in continuity with the earlier ‘mysterious’ revelation of God’s promised salvation” (1999, 24–25).

Throughout Romans, Paul uses the phrase Ἰουδαῖος τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνα (1.16; 2.9, 10) and its equivalent expressions (3.9, 29; 9.24; 10.12). There is no favoritism with God (2.11). God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles (3.29). God has called believers from both Israel and Gentiles (9.24). There is no distinction between a Jewish and a Gentile believer, for Jesus is the same Lord of all (10.12). Paul writes in Rom 1.16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for

everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Paul immediately emphasizes that the same righteousness of God is revealed in every believer. My new reading makes Rom 1.17 a stronger rhetorical statement than its conventional translations.

Some may argue that the pronoun αὐτῷ (Rom 1.17) requires a singular antecedent and, since the phrase παντὶ τῷ πιστευόντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι (Rom 1.16) is effectively plural, the former cannot refer to the latter. This criticism fails to capture the effectively plural sense of αὐτός (Rom 1.17) in conjunction with the indefinite pronoun πᾶς (Rom 1.16). There are many examples of the personal pronoun αὐτός functioning as effectively plural because of its link with the indefinite pronoun πᾶς throughout the New Testament (e.g., Matt 5.22, 28, 32; 1 Cor 11.4). Paul is a competent Greek writer and would not have made an obvious grammatical mistake, using the phrase ἐν αὐτοῖς to refer to the dative singular παντί (Rom 1.16).

Some may further suggest that the cosmic overtones of the verb ἀποκαλύπτω weigh against a focus on the individual believer. This criticism loses its force when we consider Paul’s statement in Gal 1.15-16, “God was pleased . . . to reveal his Son in me [ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί], in order that I may preach him among the Gentiles” (my translation); cf. Gal 4.19; 2 Cor 4.10-11. Paul’s use of the verb ἀποκαλύπτω with the phrase ἐν ἐμοί (Gal 1.15-16) parallels his use of the verb with the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (Rom 1.17). Paul writes in 2 Cor 5.17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Paul considers the internal transformation in a believer through Christ as a cosmic event.

To identify the noun ὁ δίκαιος (Rom 1.17) with every believer is not in any sense intended to promote justification by works. It is God’s righteousness through faith in Christ which makes a believer righteous (Rom 3.21-26). God justifies the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3.26) and, therefore, with the noun ὁ δίκαιος from LXX Hab 2.4, Paul refers to every believer in Christ. Jesus is the ultimate righteous one, on his own merit; however, those who belong to him also become righteous by virtue of his righteousness (2 Cor 5.21). Believers in Christ must live righteously, not because they must earn their justification by works, but because they already have been justified by faith in Christ; cf. 1 Cor 6.11.

“From faith to faithfulness”

Wilbur A. Benware concludes his study, “From the viewpoint of Cognitive Grammar, the asyndetic relation of the two prepositional phrases in Rom 1.17 leads to an interpretation whereby a TR [Trajector] *dikaiousunē theou* ‘moves’ between a Source (*pistis*) and a Goal (*pistis*).” He goes on, “Since the Source and Goal are expressed by the identical noun, the idiom is

best interpreted as ‘begins in faith(fulness) and ends in faith(fulness),’ or ‘faith(fulness) from beginning to end’” (Benware 2000, 338). As we will see shortly, Benware’s interpretation of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom 1.17 comes the closest to my proposed reading of it, except that he does not differentiate the syntagmatic sense of the first πίστις “faith” and that of the second πίστις “faithfulness.”

Charles L. Quarles (2003, 2–5) presents a brief survey of interpretations of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom 1.16–17: (1) “from confidence in the law to faith in the gospel” (Tertullian); (2) “first believing in the prophets and then the gospel” (Theodoret; similarly, Origen); (3) “from the faith of the Old Testament saints to the faith of New Testament believers” (Chrysostom); (4) “from the faith of the gospel preachers to the faith of those who obey it” (Augustine); (5) “from God’s faithfulness to man’s faith” (Ambrosiaster; Barth; Dunn; Davies); (6) “from present faith to future faith,” or “from faith in the unseen to faith in realities actually possessed” (Aquinas); (7) “this faith that advances and grows” (Calvin); (8) “justification by faith and faith alone” (Lietzmann; Nygren; Cranfield; Ziesler; Moo; Byrne; Fitzmyer; Schreiner); (9) “by faith to those who believe” (Cornely; Hill; Murray); (10) “faith as the ground and its goal [of the righteousness of God]” (Lightfoot; Schlatter; Hodge).⁵ Quarles conducts an extensive review of the use of the formula “from A to A” in extra-biblical Greek, the LXX, and Paul’s other letters. He concludes:

The two most likely options are that (a) the construction expresses that the revelation of the righteousness of God originated with the faithfulness of Christ and results in the faith of the believer or (b) the revelation of the righteousness of God extends from the faith of the Old Testament believer to the faith of the New Testament believer. (Quarles 2003, 21)

Quarles prefers (b) to (a) for the meaning of the phrase. According to Richard N. Longenecker, option (8) above has been the most common until recently, but option (5) has been becoming “a rising tide of scholarly opinion” from the early 1890s to the present (2016, 178). John W. Taylor argues that the phrase “from A to A” refers to the same thing, and there exists progression, movement, or growth between them. Taylor suggests:

“*From faith to faith*” is Paul’s excited report of the success of the gospel and the growing number of believers, and in particular of the advance or growth of faith among the Gentiles. . . . [Faith] in each case thus stands for a believing response to the gospel, but the increase in faith indicated by the idiom is not personal or individual growth in faith but the mounting number of converts that Paul has seen in his ministry. (Taylor 2004, 346)

⁵ See Quarles (2003) for details on the writers cited.

Taylor's claim that "from faith to faith" does not indicate "personal or individual growth in faith but the mounting number of converts that Paul has seen in his ministry" is unconvincing, when we consider that Rom 1.16-17 is the *propositio* of the letter, not just Paul's "excited report of the success of the gospel and the growing number of believers." On the one hand, Quarles's and Taylor's comprehensive surveys illuminate what the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν could mean in consideration of its general usage in the Greek language. On the other hand, however, I suggest that its particular meaning in Rom 1.16-17 becomes clearer when we pay attention to its syntagmatic and literary context and its role in the overall thematic movement of Romans, which I will explain in the following.

The overall thematic movement of Romans

Kruse observes a striking similarity in content between Rom 1.8-17 and 15.14-33, and identifies that "1.8-17 functions as a *propositio* setting out the purpose of the letter, and 15.14-33 functions as a *propositio* summing up what has been the main thrust of the letter" (2012, 58), which many other commentators also recognize. If Paul offers his readers a concise preview in Rom 1.16-17 of the major themes that he is about to develop in his letter, it provides an anchor point in the overall reading of the letter.

Arguably, Paul's major themes in Romans include God's act in Christ for salvation (cf. 3.21-26), the empowered new life that flows from this, and the equal pertinence of this to Jews and to Gentiles. Paul often moves from a focus on theological concepts to a focus on their practical applications to his readers. For example, in 1 Cor 7.12-16, Paul begins with a saying attributed to Jesus (1 Cor 7.10-11; cf. Mark 10.1-12; Matt 19.1-9) and moves to its practical applications to his readers who have an unbelieving spouse; cf. Lee (2015, 151–63). What is unique in Romans is that we see this kind of movement not only at the micro-level in each section of the letter but also at the macro-level in the overall shape of the letter.

While Romans is not a systematic theology textbook but Paul's pastoral letter to the churches in Rome, among his so-called "undisputed" letters, he here develops his theological arguments in the most organic and cohesive way in relation to the overall structure of his letter. There are good reasons for this, but they are beyond the scope of this study. I provide here a bird's eye view of Romans, which shows the thematic movement in the overall shape of the letter from Paul's focus on theological concepts to his focus on their practical applications to his readers:

- I. Introduction (1.1-17)
- II. Body (1.18–15.13)
 1. Theological concepts (1.18–11.36): Justification by faith

- A. Desperate need for God's righteousness (1.18–3.20)
- B. God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ (3.21–4.25)
- C. Effects of justification by faith (5.1–8.39)
- D. God's righteousness and Israel (9.1–11.36)
- 2. Practical applications (12.1–15.13): Life required for those who are justified by faith
 - A. God's righteousness to be revealed in Christian life (12.1–13.14)
 - B. God's righteousness to be revealed, specific to Roman churches (14.1–15.13)
- III. Conclusion (15.14–16.27).

This general overview is by no means the only way to read Romans nor is it a comprehensive structural analysis of Romans. Romans 1.18–11.36 also has practical applications and Rom 12.1–15.13 contains theological concepts as well. In the overall shape of Romans, however, Paul, being an effective communicator, moves his focus from theological concepts related to justification by faith (1.18–11.36) to their practical applications to his readers (12.1–15.13). Though, obviously, Romans is not only about justification by faith but contains many other themes, I consider the concept of justification by faith as a central theme that weaves the other themes together in an organic and cohesive way. This provides an important clue to understanding the meaning of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (Rom 1.17).

"Faith." Daniel Arichea begins his study, "The word 'faith' (Greek *pistis*, or *pisteuin*, 'to believe') is rather a deceptive word—it looks so simple, but in fact it is a very difficult word to understand and to translate" (1979, 420). In his "tentative and limited" survey of the New Testament letters, Arichea lists the following meanings of the word: (1) trust and commitment to someone; (2) Christian virtue; (3) acceptance of something as true; (4) doctrine or teaching; (5) a religious movement; (6) certainty or conviction; and (7) "those who believe," meaning "Christians." Despite the helpfulness of Arichea's study, we need to further examine this word's root in the LXX and how Paul may be using it in Rom 1.17.

The LXX uses the word πίστις in the following senses: (1) faithfulness, (2) faith, (3) confidence, and (4) honor. It typically renders the Hebrew word אמונה as πίστις, and the semantic realm of אמונה and that of πίστις cover both "faith/trust" (1 Sam 26.23; 1 Chr 9.22, 26, 31; Hab 2.4; Jer 9.2) and "faithfulness/obedience" (Deut 32.20; 2 Kgs 12.16; 22.7; 2 Chr 31.12, 15, 18; 34.12; Ps 33.4; Prov 3.3; 12.17, 22; 14.22 [2x]; Hos 2.20; Jer 5.1, 3; 15.18; 35.9; 39.41; 40.6). Varghese P. Chiraparamban points out that "in Paul πίστις or πιστεύω is something that happens between persons, not an idea to be held as true. . . . This relational understanding of πίστις as *trust*

in God gives us a more reliable guide to Paul's meaning than *faith*" (2015, 186–87). However, as Kevin W. McFadden argues, "a distinction between the active meaning of πίστις (faith) and its passive meaning (faithfulness) is evident in Paul. . . . Pauline scholars should not use the gloss 'faith(fulness)' for the word πίστις" (2015, 251).

"*Obedience of faith.*" Paul uses the phrase ὑπακοή πίστεως at the beginning (1.5) and end (16.26) of Romans. He uses the noun ὑπακοή throughout his letter (1.5; 5.19; 6.16; 15.18; 16.19, 26), which shows the importance of the theme of obedience in Romans. Mark D. Nanos (among others) lists four major grammatical options for the phrase ὑπακοή πίστεως: (1) *objective genitive* ("obedience to the faith"); (2) *subjective genitive* or *genitive of source* ("the obedience that faith works" or "obedience that springs from faith"); (3) *adjectival genitive* ("faith's obedience"); and (4) *genitive of apposition* ("the obedience that consists in faith") (1996, 224).

Though I prefer genitive of source to the other options, I agree with Nanos's statement that "in the end one's grammatical conclusions seem to be shaped more by one's theological understanding of the contexts than the other way around" (1996, 224). According to Don B. Garlington (1994, 12), Rom 1.5 expresses "the design of Paul's apostleship" and "Rom 16.26 forms part of the letter's concluding doxology, which ascribes glory to the only wise God for his confirmation of the Romans in the gospel preached by Paul." As Nanos notes:

Paul's fascinating programmatic phrase "obedience of faith," which appears in the midst of these contexts throughout this letter actually knits together and succinctly defines the various strands of this message to Rome expounding the distinctively Judaic nature of the "obedience" that ought to characterize the lifestyles of Christian gentiles professing "faith" in One God. (Nanos 1996, 219–20)

While the noun ὑπακοή and the noun πίστις are not synonyms, Paul uses them closely together, reflecting his Judaic understanding of faith and obedience. Paul gives thanks for the Roman churches' faith (1.8), but he also gives thanks for their obedience (16.19). Just as Paul associates faith with obedience, he associates unbelief with disobedience (10.21; 11.30; 15.31). Paul's phrase διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (3.22) parallels another phrase διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνός (5.19). As Garlington observes, "ὑπακοή πίστεως forms the complement of 'the righteousness of God' as revealed ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (Rom 1.17). In short, 'the obedience of faith' concentrates into one short sequence of words the essence of Paul's gospel of salvation for the world" (1994, 145).

"*From faith.*" Paul uses the phrase ἐκ πίστεως throughout Romans (1.17 [2x]; 3.26, 30; 4.16; 5.1; 9.32; 10.6; 14.23). Paul expounds justification by faith in 3.21–31. Among many verbal parallels between 1.16–17 and

3.21-31, the most relevant is the phrase ἐκ πίστεως (1.17), which reappears in 3.26, 30, with respect to the free gift of God's righteousness (3.24).⁶

As Joseph A. Fitzmyer notes, "The phrase stresses the way a person comes to share in life in Christ or salvation" (1993, 265). No one will be justified before God by the works of the law, but, now, God's righteousness has been revealed through faith in Jesus Christ—or, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ—for all who believe (3.20-22a). In 3.22b-26 Paul spells out most explicitly how this righteousness of God is revealed in every believer (cf. 8.1-4). God's righteousness is revealed in every believer in his or her initial faith in Christ. After defending justification by faith with the scriptural evidence that God justified Abraham by his faith (Gen 15.6) before his circumcision (Gen 17.10) in ch. 4, Paul uses the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in Rom 5.1 to refer to a believer's initial faith in Christ. Paul describes Christian believers as those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of God's righteousness (5.17).

When discussing Israel and the gospel, Paul uses the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in a similar way (9.32; 10.6). He refers to a believer's initial faith in Christ in most cases of his use of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in Romans (1.17 [2x]; 3.26, 30; 5.1; 9.32; 10.6). Paul also refers to Abraham's faith in God's promise (4.16) and a believer's continuing obedience to God (14.23). In Rom 3.30-31, Paul uses both phrases, ἐκ πίστεως and δια πίστεως, to refer to a believer's initial faith in Christ. The statement "God's righteousness is revealed in every believer from faith (ἐκ πίστεως)" points to the grace and free gift of God's righteousness received and experienced by a believer, when he or she first believed in Christ. Every believer in Christ is the righteous who will live by faith in Hab 2.4. God is righteous—God is right—to justify those who believe in Christ, because of his atoning sacrifice for their sins; God has paid the price for their ransom (Rom 3.21-26). Christ is the righteousness from God (1 Cor 1.30). There is a definite forensic sense of God's righteousness in Rom 1.17 in accordance with the justification theme throughout Romans (cf. 2.13; 3.4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4.2, 6, 11, 13, 25; 5.1, 9, 16, 17, 18, 21; 6.13, 18, 20; 8.10, 30, 33; 9.30, 31; 10.3, 4, 6, 10).

"*To faithfulness.*" In contrast to Paul's frequent use of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in Romans and elsewhere, he uses the phrase εἰς πίστιν only once, in Rom 1.17, among his undisputed letters. This poses a certain challenge for us to know what exactly Paul means by it. In the Greek language, the preposition εἰς is commonly used with a noun in its accusative form to

⁶ Other parallels include: (1) in correspondence with the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (1.17), Paul concentrates δικαιοσ- related words in 3.21-31: δίκαιος (26), δικαιοσύνη [θεοῦ] (21, 25, 26), and δικαιοῦ (24, 26, 28, 30); (2) the verb ἀποκαλύπτω (1.17) parallels φανερόω (3.21); cf. ἐνδείξει (3.26); and (3) the phrase παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι (1.16) correlates with the phrase εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας (3.22).

indicate direction. Paul uses the construction this way in the phrases εἰς τὴν Σπανίαν (Rom 15.24) and εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ (Rom 15.25). As mentioned earlier, Benware's interpretation of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom 1.17 as "begins in faith(fulness) and ends in faith(fulness)" (2000, 338) expresses this directional sense.

Though I agree with Benware that Paul conveys here a sense of direction or movement—either literally (my reading) or metaphorically (Benware's reading)—in the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom 1.17, I contend that its more precise sense is "from faith to faithfulness." God's righteousness is revealed in every believer and it is a dynamic movement, not stopping at justification by faith. God's righteousness revealed in every believer moves from an initial faith in Christ to continuing Christ-like obedience to God—an ongoing orientation that would be called "sanctification" (cf. Phil 2.12-13) in later Christian theology. Romans 1.18 also supports this reading, as Paul uses the verb ἀποκαλύπτω once again and contrasts God's righteousness revealed in every believer's faithful Christ-like obedience to God with God's wrath revealed against humanity's unrighteousness.

As believers are predestined to conform to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8.29), God's righteousness is revealed in every believer, as he or she follows the example of Christ (cf. Gal 4.19; 1 Cor 4.16; 11.1; 2 Cor 4.10-11; 9.13). Paul mentions a believer's union with Christ (Rom 6) and his or her new life in the Spirit (Rom 8): walking in the newness of life (6.4); living with Christ (6.7); living for God in Christ Jesus (6.10-11); presenting oneself as a servant to righteousness towards sanctification (6.19); being led by the Spirit of God as the children of God (8.14); suffering with Christ to be glorified with Christ (8.17); having the first fruits of the Spirit, patiently waiting for adoption, the redemption of bodies through perseverance (8.23-25); conforming to the image of the Son of God (8.29); and overcoming all things through God's love in Christ Jesus (8.37-39).

However, in Rom 12.1–15.13, Paul presents far more concrete descriptions of what the life of those who are justified by faith in Christ should look like. Paul begins his exhortation part with the following words (12.1-2):

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

As Kruse notes, Paul "appears to be alluding to instructions concerning sacrifices in the OT. When the animals were presented at the tabernacle/temple, they were still living, and had to be 'holy' (Lev 6.25; 7.1; 22.3, 15) and 'acceptable to God' (Lev 1.3; 22.19, 20)." Kruse continues, "We

might add that Paul employs the idea of a ‘living sacrifice’ deliberately because the sacrifice he has in mind is not martyrdom, but rather lives that are pleasing to God” (2012, 462). When we take a moment and think about the perfect example of such holy and acceptable sacrifice to God, it is Jesus Christ, whom God put as ἱλαστήριον (Rom 3.25); cf. 8.1-4; 1 Cor 5.7b. Thomas D. Stegman comments, “As God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah revealed the righteousness of God through his self-offering, in love, on the cross [cf. Rom 5.6-11]; in other words, he manifested God’s character as self-giving love” (2011, 523). It is certainly not by coincidence that, as Michael Thompson (1991) emphasizes, Paul frequently echoes the Jesus tradition in Rom 12.1–15.13, e.g., Rom 12.14 (cf. Matt 5.44; Luke 6.27-28); Rom 13.7 (cf. Mark 12.7); Rom 13.8-10 (cf. Matt 5.43; 19.19; 22.39; Mark 12.31, 33; Luke 10.27); Rom 14.14 (cf. Mark 7.15; Matt 15.11); Rom 14.17 (cf. Matt 5.3-12); and Rom 15.3 (cf. John 8.29).

Given the parallelism between the beginning and the ending sections of the letter, and given that the ending strongly emphasizes the role of obedience, I posit that the second part of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (1.17) refers to a believer’s continuing Christ-like obedience to God. Believers ought to bless those who persecute them and not curse them (12.14). They have to pay their taxes and honor public servants (13.7). They should love one another, through which they fulfill the law (13.8). They are to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (13.12). They must be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ and not succumb to their fleshly desires (13.14). Paul writes, “Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (14.13). Paul emphasizes, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men” (14.17-18); Paul attests the same adjective εὐάρεστος (“acceptable”) as in 12.1-2.

A believer must please his or her neighbors for their good, to build them up, just as Christ did not please himself but received insults on behalf of God (15.1-3). Paul writes in his *propositio*, “Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (15.15-16; cf. 1 Pet 2.5). As an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11.13; cf. Gal 1.15-16; 2.9; Eph 3.7-9), Paul’s priestly service of the gospel of God requires him not only to bring the offering of the Gentiles to God but also to make sure that it is acceptable (εὐπρόσδεκτος) to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul's hermeneutical creativity

More than forty years ago, E. P. Sanders (1977) challenged the previous NT scholarship's stereotypical depiction of Second Temple Judaism as a works-based legalistic religion. Instead, Sanders argues that its common soteriological framework is what he calls "covenantal nomism," famously put as "getting in" the covenant by God's gracious election and "staying in" the covenant by obedience to the law (420). Sanders argues that Paul was reflecting on Judaism from the viewpoint of life in Christ: "Paul's thought did not run from plight to solution, but rather from solution to plight" (443). He concludes, "It is thus not first of all against the *means* of being properly religious which are appropriate to Judaism that Paul polemicizes ('by works of law'), but against the prior fundamentals of Judaism. . . . In short, *this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity*" (551–52).

It goes beyond the scope of this study to discuss the contributions to the topic of justification by those who identify with the New Perspective on Paul (cf. Lee 2016). However, I do see a parallel between what Sanders calls "covenantal nomism"—the typical soteriological framework in biblical Judaism and Second Temple Judaism—and how Paul explains the organic connection between what later Christian theologians described as "justification by faith" and "sanctification."

Paul's creativity as a writer is conspicuous in that he uses the preposition ἐκ in the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in a directional sense in Rom 1.17, whereas he typically uses the preposition ἐκ in the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in an instrumental sense (cf. δια πίστεως, 3.30, 31) elsewhere in Romans (1.17b; 3.26, 30; 4.16; 5.1; 9.32; 10.6; 14.23). By the idiom "from A to A," Paul portrays God's righteousness revealed in every believer as a dynamic movement from one's initial faith in Christ to his or her continuing Christ-like obedience to God. Seifrid comments on Rom 1.16-17:

The revelation of God's righteousness leads to the act of faith (εἰς πίστιν) which appropriates it (παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι). The righteousness conferred by God, revealed in the Gospel through faith, is given to faith. The dual prepositional usage is not merely stylistic then. The phrase εἰς πίστιν removes any misunderstanding regarding the means by which the δικαιοσύνη manifest in the Gospel is acquired. Paul is able to use the Habakkuk citation (ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται) as a summary of the whole. (Seifrid 1992, 218)

What Seifrid calls "the act of faith" here is equivalent to my translation of the phrase εἰς πίστιν as "to faithfulness." Seifrid correctly highlights here the intrinsic link between a Christian believer's justification by faith in Jesus Christ (ἐκ πίστεως) and ongoing obedience to God in everyday life (εἰς πίστιν). As I argued earlier, my new reading of Rom 1.17 more clearly explains how and why "Paul is able to use the Habakkuk citation as

a summary of the whole [letter]” than most English translations available today. As Stegman notes, “Paul’s exhortations to ‘God’s beloved in Rome’ (1.7) are therefore based on his understanding that the Spirit-empowered community gathered around Christ and consisting of Jews and Gentiles (15.9) is called to be the ongoing manifestation of the *dikaiosynē theou*” (2011, 521).

Contrary to Käsemann’s claim, his understanding of God’s righteousness as God’s saving power that creates new obedience (*nova obedientia*) does not explain clearly the intrinsic link between “to declare righteous” (*gerecht erklären*) and “to make righteous” (*gerecht machen*). Seifrid notes:

The Gospel as δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν, unlike δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in 1:17, includes the *nova obedientia* of believers, since it embraces the theology of the entire letter. Although Paul’s statement in Rom 1:16 is formulated on the basis of a distinction between Jew and Gentile, and is followed by an assertion regarding righteousness by faith, v. 16 cannot be interpreted as having merely a forensic force. (Seifrid 1992, 212)

My new reading of Rom 1.16-17 does not have to make such a distinction that “the power of God for salvation” involves the new obedience of believers while “God’s righteousness” does not. God’s righteousness, in this new reading, incorporates here both a forensic sense (“from faith [in Jesus Christ]”) and a behavioral/participatory sense (“to faithfulness”; *nova obedientia*). We have a case of semantic density in the expression “God’s righteousness.” First, God’s righteousness is revealed in every believer in his or her initial faith in Christ. God is righteous to justify every believer, because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice (3.25). Second, God’s righteousness is revealed in every believer in his or her continuing Christ-like obedience to God. God is righteous, or God is right, in that Christ’s atoning sacrifice was not in vain (3.25; cf. 5.8), for it produces fruits in those justified by faith in Christ (14.18). Those in Christ become God’s righteousness (2 Cor 5.21). Therefore, those in Christ naturally demonstrate God’s righteousness in everyday life as their testimony to God’s grace in Christ.

Paul’s emphasis on the new life in Christ throughout Romans thematically echoes Rom 1.16-17. The question arises whether or not Paul’s first audience would have understood the unique phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν as “from faith (in Jesus Christ) to (Christlike) faithfulness,” as I am proposing here. Perhaps not at that very moment. However, this unique expression certainly would have captivated his original audience, keeping them wondering what he may have meant by it to the end of the letter.⁷ After reading the entire letter, Paul’s first audience would have understood what he meant by this

⁷ Perhaps a trained lector could elaborate on the author’s intended sense, as he or she proceeded in the reading of the text.

phrase and identified themselves with the righteous who will live by faith, mentioned in Hab 2.4, and been encouraged to live out their faith in action.

Conclusion

This study proposes a reading of Rom 1.17 as “For God’s righteousness is revealed in every believer from faith to faithfulness, as it was written, ‘The righteous will live by faith,’” considering its syntagmatic and literary context and its role in the overall shape of Romans. Conventional English translations of Rom 1.16-17 identify the third person singular dative pronoun αὐτῷ in v. 17 with the neuter singular nominative τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in v. 16 (e.g., ESV, “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed”). This study identifies the personal pronoun αὐτῷ with the phrase παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι rather than the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. The former is the closest possible antecedent and it makes better sense of Paul’s citation of LXX Hab 2.4. Considering that Rom 1.16-17 functions as the *propositio* of the letter, as is recognized by many commentators, the phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν means “from faith to faithfulness” in the light of the thematic movement in the overall shape of Romans. Paul moves from a focus on theological concepts related to justification by faith (chs. 1–11) to a focus on their practical applications to his readers (chs. 12–16). The first πίστις refers to a believer’s justification by faith in Christ and the second πίστις refers to the believer’s subsequent sanctification.

This reading of Rom 1.17 effectively captures Paul’s holistic and dynamic portrait of Christian life, evident in Romans and elsewhere. Regardless of whether or not one accepts this reading, Paul shows the vital link between faith in Christ and Christ-like obedience to God, in which Paul agrees with James, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (Jas 2.26).

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Abbreviations

- CJB Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
 ESV English Standard Version (2001, 2016)
 GNB Good News Bible (1994)
 LXX Septuagint
 MT Masoretic Text
 NET NET Bible (New English Translation; 2001)
 NIV New International Version (1978)
 NJB New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
 NLT New Living Translation (1996)