

THE TRANSLATION OF ROMANS 1:17— A BASIC MOTIF IN PAULINISM

WILBER B. WALLIS

Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri 63131

Professor D. Moody Smith, Jr. has put us all in his debt by his able article "*HO DE DIKAIOS EK PISTEOS ZESETAI*," in the *Festschrift* for Professor Kenneth Willis Clark. Prof. Smith has used the Greek words of Romans 1:17 as the title of his article.¹ Prof. Smith's thesis is that the *ek pisteos* of Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX) and Romans 1:17b should be construed with the verb *zesetai* and not with the subject of the sentence, *ho dikaios*. The indications are that the Qumran interpretation as well as Paul's contemporaries so read the text. It will appear that the LXX also must have construed *ek pisteos* with the verb.

The question then arises, why have recent influential translations of Romans chosen to construe the *ek pisteos* with the subject rather than with the predicate? The *NEB* renders, "He shall gain life who is justified through faith," and the *RSV* says: "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

Commentators likewise have long been divided on the question. Prof. Smith reports that Zahn, Sanday and Headlam, Dodd, Michel, Lyonnet, Leenhardt, Schrenk, Murray, and F. F. Bruce take *ek pisteos* with the verb. On the other hand, Lietzmann, Lagrange, Goguel and Monnier, Kuhl, Cerfaux, Boylan, Barrett, Nygren, and Ricciotti put *ek pisteos* with the subject (*Studies*, p. 21). Lightfoot, among the older commentators, says, "I cannot doubt that *ek pisteos* is to be taken with *zesetai*; and not with *ho dikaios*" (*Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 250).

Prof. Smith thinks that the principal reason students have chosen to take *ek pisteos* with *dikaïos* "is undoubtedly the striking relationship between this reading of the Habakkuk quotation and the structure of Romans. It is certainly true that 'he who through faith is righteous' is an apt heading for Romans 1-4, while 'shall live' or 'life' corresponds rather well with the contents of chapters 5-8:29" (*Studies*, p. 19).

Prof. Smith by exegesis of Galatians 3:11, where Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted again, endeavors to show that Paul took the *ek pisteos* with the verb. Though I have some reservations about details of Smith's exegesis, I nevertheless think his conclusion is correct, and I propose to elaborate two additional considerations in its favor.

1. Second article in XXIX (STUDIES & DOCUMENTS, ed. Jacob Geerlings), *Studies in the History and Text of the New Testament in honor of Kenneth Willis Clark*, Boyd L. Daniels & M. Jack Suggs, eds., pp. 13-25—hereafter cited as *Studies*.

My first argument is based on the meaning of the Hebrew word *'amunah*, translated *pistis* in the LXX. The prevailing meaning of *'amunah*, *'amunah* being construed with the predicate of the sentence, and due weight being given to the extraordinary expedient of the LXX in translating the Hebrew preposition *beth* by *ek*, furnishes Paul with a more incisive argument against legalism. The indications would be that Paul was entirely faithful to his Old Testament, and that he did not derive his doctrine of justification from the Old Testament by a forced and tenuous exegesis.

My second argument is that construing *ek pisteos* with the predicate allows the whole expression "the just shall live from faith" to sum up the entire outline of Romans.

First, then, what is the meaning of *'amunah*? It appears uniformly to mean "firmness, steadfastness, fidelity" (*BDB*). This is clearly the meaning adopted by the LXX. Apparently the LXX uniformly reads *mou*, either before or after *ek pisteos*, thus fixing the meaning of *'amunah* as *faithfulness*, God's faithfulness. B. B. Warfield seems to have sensed the problem of the meaning of *'amunah*: "... 'faith' in its active sense, can barely be accounted an Old Testament term. It occurs in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament only twice: Deuteronomy xxxii:20 where it represents the Hebrew *emun* and Habakkuk ii:4 where it stands for the Hebrew *'amunah*; and it would seem to be really demanded in no passage but Habakkuk ii:4. ... Here only the term occurs in the Old Testament; but on this its sole occurrence it rises to the full height of its most pregnant meaning" (*Biblical Foundations*, p. 337).

Albert Schweitzer charges Paul with the importation of "faith" into the word which uniformly means "faithfulness." Schweitzer in a characteristic passage describes Paul's mental process:

Another reason which led Paul to the expression "righteousness by faith" was that it is required in the only passage from Scripture which he can cite in support of his doctrine. Let us try to imagine the position in which he found himself in trying to expound his doctrine of freedom from the Law. It can no doubt be derived with demonstrative clearness from the eschatological doctrine of redemption and the mystical doctrine of the dying and rising again with Christ. But what profits logical correctness when his opponents have Scripture on their side? And the Scripture is theirs to use in all its utterances save two. These two passages were Paul's brilliant discovery. One of them recounts that Abraham believed God and that this was reckoned to him for righteousness (Gen. xv.6=Gal. iii.6; Rom. iv.3). With it Paul combines another, from Habakkuk, which he interprets as meaning, "He who is righteous by faith shall live" (Hab. ii.4=Gal. iii.11; Rom. i.17).

The Hebrew text has "The righteous shall live by his faithfulness (*b'amunato*)". Out of that the Septuagint makes "by my (God's) faithfulness" (*ek pisteos mou*). By combining the original text and the Greek translation Paul arrives at *ho dikaios ek pisteos zesetai*, in which he takes *pistis* not as faithfulness but as faith, separates "by

faith" from the verb and combines it into the noun to form a single term. Thus arises the statement necessary to his argument, "The by-faith-righteous man shall live."

For Paul these two passages—Genesis xv.6 and Habakkuk ii.4—express the real meaning of the Scriptures. With them he invalidates all others.²

In view of the uniformity of the ancient testimony favoring "faithfulness" as the meaning of *'amunah*, and the problems of modern students, is it not reasonable to seek to understand the Habakkuk context and Paul's argument with the more common meaning of *'amunah* in mind?

T. K. Cheyne saw the possibility of reading the Habakkuk context with the meaning of 'fidelity.' He assumes the possibility of amending the Masoretic text to agree with the LXX and says: "...surely *b'amunati* most naturally means, 'by my fidelity to my promise' (cp. Ps. 89:33 f) and *ek pisteos mou* can certainly mean this."³ It would seem that the situation described by Habakkuk could be met better by an appeal to God's faithfulness. Jeremiah, Habakkuk's contemporary, said, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23).

Not only for the ancient historical context is the meaning "faithfulness" felicitous, but it strengthens the place of Galatians 3:11 in the context of Paul's argument. Paul is opposing legalism, and proves that the legalists of Galatians 3:10—"they who are of works of law"—are under a curse. The legalist by concentrating attention on "works of law" and especially circumcision, erred, as did the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus had criticized: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23). So Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, adding the pregnant interpretive "all": "cursed is everyone who continueth not in *all* things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." The immediate context has referred to Abraham's justification, and in Romans 10:8 and following Paul is careful to show that Moses' message and method of justification is precisely what he, Paul, was preaching. It seems clear that Paul is not charging the legalist with failure in some minor details, but with rejection of the grace of God, and that having neglected the grace of God, must of necessity remain under the curse of the broken law. Before Paul points to the way of deliverance from the curse, in verses eleven and twelve, he shows that the very logic of legalism is contradicted by Habakkuk 2:4b.

Legalism must affirm: The unjustified man can keep the law of God, and so eschatologically be justified and attain life. The reply from Habakkuk is: "The just man lives from [God's] faithfulness." Attention is focused on

2. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, p. 208.

3. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Col. 1495 f.n.

man's life now. There is a double negation of the presupposition of legalism: it is the justified man who lives this present life; he need not, and indeed cannot, wait for an eschatological justification. Only by being justified now can he please God. Further, he lives this life *ek pisteos*, which is obviously intended to offset and negate the *en nomo* preceding, taken in the legalistic sense. A man must be justified before he can please God. Life that is pleasing to God must be lived out of God's covenant faithfulness, and that life is lived in God's law. It would appear that the opposition of Habakkuk 2:4 to legalism is much more clear if the "faith" there mentioned is God's faithfulness. The just man lives *from* or *in* God's faithfulness—surely that was Habakkuk's message, and his contemporary, Jeremiah, in the same situation said: "Great is thy faithfulness." The contrast is thus more complete and uncompromising. Human faith and faithfulness are not removed from the situation, but are based upon divine faithfulness; the source of a righteous life is God's faithfulness. The main contrast lies between the faithfulness and grace of God on the one hand, and the basic self-confidence of legalism on the other—a legalism which assumed that a person prior to being justified is nevertheless able to keep the law of God.

The assumption that Paul is speaking of God's faithfulness fits the conditions of the argument much better. Thus it is not the Old Testament which is negated, as Schweitzer ironically supposed, but the fiction of legalism. Paul's argument then moves on to the confirmation from Leviticus 18:5, beautifully reinforcing Habakkuk 2:4—man lives by God's faithfulness, and lives in God's law. The handling of this latter text in Romans 10 shows that Moses emphatically did not preach a legalistic message.

Yet another feature of the LXX rendering of Habakkuk 2:4 fits well with the demands of Paul's argument. The unusual feature of translating the preposition *beth* by *ek* is very striking. Probably there was something in the context which demanded the emphasis on "source" which the *ek* supplied much better than the usual and conventional *en*. Yet this translation seems to have been acceptable to all parties in the first-century debate. Evidence increases that the Phoenician-Hebrew *beth* means *from*. Dahood calls attention to this use of *beth* in verses 9, 14 and 16 of Psalm 18.⁴ The parallels in the Psalm and in 2 Samuel 22 use the corresponding *min*. The LXX rendering is linguistically sound. Moreover, in a context in which God speaks to reassure his people, it seems highly appropriate that the emphasis should fall on *His* faithfulness. We may compare Psalm 89:33, 34: "But my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness [*amunah*] to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

The sharp emphasis on the divine source of the life of the righteous is most apt in Paul's reply to the legalist. In Romans 1:17a also, Smith well observes that righteousness is revealed *ek pisteos* and this expression is probably derived from the *ek pisteos* of the Habakkuk quotation which immediately follows. The appropriateness of seeking the divine source of

4. *Anchor Bible: Psalms*, v. I, p. 107.

the revelation is strengthened by the immediately following parallel of the revelation of wrath from heaven (v. 18).

Thus a number of lines of evidence argue for the correctness of the LXX interpretation. The correctness and acceptability of this rendering are confirmed by the citation in Hebrews 10:38, with the undoubted inclusion of *mou*, either before or after *ek pisteos*.

In my opinion, it is misleading to speak of the enclitic *mou* as modifying the preceding word. Its position is flexible in New Testament usage, and it may be placed before the word with which it is grammatically construed, and yet, as an enclitic, be dependent on the preceding word. This proleptic placement of *mou* occurs frequently, as in I Corinthians 9:27, Matthew 16:18 and Romans 11:14. Hence, either position of the *mou* in Hebrews 10:38, either after *pisteos* or after *dikaïos*, would give the same meaning—"my faithfulness." The translation "my just one" is probably incorrect.

The second argument in favor of construing the *ek pisteos* of Habakkuk 2:4 with the verb is that there results an apt characterization of the two main themes of Romans: how the ungodly man is justified, and how the justified man lives. How a man is justified, with the answers to objections, comprise chapters one to eleven. The life of the justified is dealt with in the climactic ethical chapters of Romans 12 to 16. Principles of sanctification as based on justification are advanced in chapters 6 to 8, but the details of the life of the justified are presented in chapters 12 to 16. This latter subject is appropriately summed up in the words "the just man will live out of God's faithfulness."

The theme of Romans is not simply justification by faith, but salvation, including both the justifying of the ungodly and the subsequent life of the justified. These two aspects of salvation are implied in the "salvation" and "righteousness" themes of various Old Testament texts as Murray has shown.⁵ The sum total of ethical and eschatological deliverance is implied. This whole and entire salvation both in inception and subsequent ethical conduct are said by Paul to be given to the one who believes. It is a salvation-righteousness which is revealed out of faith to faith: that is, revealed from God's covenant faithfulness to man's faith, in both aspects of salvation, both in its inception and subsequent progress. These two aspects are found or implied in the subject and predicate of the word from Habakkuk. The just or justified man lives by faith. It is true of both justification and sanctification that in the gospel God's righteousness is being revealed from His covenant faithfulness to man's faith. In the Habakkuk statement the emphasis falls on sanctification. God's righteousness is being revealed from God's covenant faithfulness to man's faith, so that man may live by faith. But it is the *justified* man who thus lives. Therefore there is implied the doctrine that the ungodly has become just—and therein also God's righteousness is revealed from God's covenant faithfulness to man's

5. John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the N.T. The Epistle to the Romans*, v. 1, p. 29 f.

faith. Paul can therefore conclude that his whole doctrine of salvation—justification and sanctification—is mirrored in the statement of Habakkuk.

Can the idea that God's righteousness is revealed from God's covenant faithfulness to man's faith be justified from Habakkuk? The man lives; his life of faith is implied; he lives "from [God's covenant] faithfulness," which is there in the *ek pisteos mou*. Moreover, it is a just man who so lives. Is it difficult to see that God's covenant faithfulness accepted the ungodly—Abraham!—when he believed and accepted the covenant?

Moreover, Paul is not dependent only, or even primarily, on Habakkuk 2:4 for his doctrine of justification by faith. As Schweitzer noted, Paul had two texts, Habakkuk 2:4 and Genesis 15:6. Paul turns to the justification of Abraham in Romans 4, and by careful analysis shows that Abraham was justified prior to circumcision. Paul's two texts complement one another: the one clarifies the inception of salvation in justification, while the Habakkuk text epitomizes the life of the justified.

This wholistic conception of salvation leads to a more balanced view of the structure of Romans. It is one-sided to say that the subject of the book is justification by faith. It would be more apt to say that the object is the life of the justified. This conception underlies the structure of Paul's epistles: the doctrine of salvation is regularly followed by the appeal to ethical fruitfulness. This progress in thought is clear in Romans: chapter 12 begins with the appeal to do the will of God. Hence it can be argued that Habakkuk 2:4b, as quoted in Romans 1:17, forecasts Paul's outline of his epistle. The first question to be answered is how can the ungodly be justified? This is stated in chapters 1 through 5, and objections are answered in 6 through 11. The necessity for a life of faith, hope, and love is introduced in principle (chapters 6-8) as an answer to the false charge that the idea of salvation by faith sets aside and misinterprets the law. So far from dishonoring the law, it exalts the law by enabling sinful man to walk obediently in it. Having introduced the principle, Paul returns to the subject in chapter 12 to 16 to give specific instructions about the life of the just. These instructions are added as the climactic appeal of the letter, thus answering to the theme foreshadowed in the word from Habakkuk: the just man lives from faith.

Prof. Smith's thesis that *ek pisteos* should be construed with the predicate is, in my opinion, correct. However, when that basic decision is made, the question arises: What is the meaning and connotation of *'amunah-pistis*? The Old Testament overwhelmingly favors "faithfulness." In the New Testament field, since the publication of the articles of Torrance^{5a} and Hebert,⁶ and Longenecker's cautious acceptance of their argument,⁷ the

5a. T. F. Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *The Expository Times*, v. LXVIII, No. 4 (Jan., 1957).

6. A. G. Hebert, "'Faithfulness' and 'Faith,'" *Theology*, v. LVIII, No. 424 (Oct., 1955).

7. Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, pp. 149-150.

appropriateness of the meaning "faithfulness" for *pistis* in a number of Pauline contexts is being recognized.

With the meaning of "faithfulness" as an option in Romans 1:17b, we may return to our basic problem. How shall we translate Romans 1:17? We must seek to do justice to the now recognized fact that the just man is the "one who has been justified," as Schrenk observes.⁸ We must construe the *ek pisteos* with the verb; take into account the sharp emphasis on source expressed by *ek*; and lay the stress on *pistis* as pointing to God's covenant faithfulness and grace. A possible rendering would be: "The justified person lives out of [God's covenant] faithfulness."

8. Schrenk, *TDNT*, II, p. 191.

