

Commentary on Romans 1:14-17

Introduction

The commentary starts with an assumption that the Greeks were Christians and the barbarians were not. Paul introduces the “both and” manner of his Christian covenant membership. With precise structure and unanswered questions, he proceeds to develop an argument as he retraces new creation history back to Jesus.

Approximate translation

1:14 Greeks . both . and . barbarians . wise . both . and . foolish . indebted. I am .

1:15 in this manner . the . according to/as to/in/through . me .
forward in spirit . also . to you . the . in . Rome . to preach the gospel .

1:16 not . indeed . I am ashamed of . the . gospel .

force . indeed . God . is . to/into/for . salvation .
everyone . to the . faithful . Jewish . both . first . and . Greek .

1:17 righteousness . indeed . God . in/on/among . themselves . revealed .
out from . faith . to/into/for . faith .
as . it is written . The . and . righteous . out from . faith . will live .

Assume

- i. Post Jesus cross and resurrection, Christians are covenant members and non-Christians are not covenant members.¹
- ii. The Greeks were Christians.

1:14

Greeks . both . and . barbarians .

Assume the Greeks were Christians and the barbarians were not.² Then somehow, Greeks “both and” barbarians are Christian covenant members. Paul has not explained the *how* or the *why*, but the

¹ This assumption is based on reasoned, storied, historical, Biblical, Christian covenantal theology.

² Barbarians were known by the early Greeks as foreigners, perhaps with “vices and savage natures” and the word was later adopted by the Romans for anyone not under Greco-Roman influence and domination. For this definition of *barbaros*, see the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Barbarians, n.d.). See also the *Discussion* below, “The barbarian foolish.”

questions are pressing. Let the phrase “both and” mean one and the other such that both are true.³ Greek Christians “both and” barbarians are covenant members.

wise . both . and . foolish .

Paul continues the “both and” of covenant membership with a play on Greek and barbarian stereotypes (Paul cares about covenant membership and not ethnic or social stereotypes). Let covenant members be “wise.” The Greek Christians were “wise” and the barbarian was “foolish”; and then wise “both and” foolish are covenant members.

indebted . I am .

Paul is indebted of covenant membership in this “both and” pattern. On The Road to Damascus (see Acts 9, Acts 26, Galatians 1 and 1 Corinthians 15), those whom Paul persecuted were covenant members, and Paul was not. Then, those Paul persecuted “both and” Paul are covenant members.

See also the *Discussion* below, “Tithing” .

1:15

in this manner . the . according to/as to/in/through . me . forward in spirit . also . to you . the . in . Rome . to preach the gospel .

houtōs (translated: in this manner/thus/so) functions as a kind of pivot point, referring both backwards and forwards. Here, Paul refers backwards and forwards in new creation history and prophecy.⁴ The next and connected phrase is *to kat’ eme* (translated: the according to/as to/in/through me):

houtōs refers backwards in history to Paul’s *how* of “both and” covenant membership. Again, Paul has not explained the *how* of The Road to Damascus story.

And *houtōs* (and with the shape of Paul’s unexplained *how*), “forwards in spirit” for their “both and” of covenant membership also. The word *prothymon* can be translated “forward in spirit.”

Paul’s manner is grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7) as he preaches “the gospel.”

See also the *Discussion* below, “Paul’s manner” and “The barbarian foolish.”

1:16

not . indeed . I am ashamed of . the . gospel .

Paul is not ashamed of “the gospel” he preaches. *epaischynomai* (translated: ashamed) can mean that Paul has not attracted faith that turns out to be without foundation. In the context of preaching that

³ Also, this is the opposite of one and not the other.

⁴ New creation, since Paul writes, “Therefore if anyone in Christ, new creation” 2 Corinthians 5:17a.

“Jesus the Jewish Messiah, who was crucified, buried and bodily raised from the dead is Lord of heaven and earth”;⁵ Paul is saying that his announcement is with foundation.

force . indeed . God . is . to/into/for . salvation .

With the foundation in mind (see above), Paul says: “dynamite” force indeed God is *eis* salvation. In this way, Paul connects God’s power with the Lord Jesus Christ and with his confidence in the gospel proclamation.

Let “*eis* salvation” have depth of meaning. The word *eis* can mean to/into/for, and presumably connects up with the “both and” of covenant membership Paul has already raised. *eis* (translated: to/into/for) supports incorporative salvation “into” Jesus the saviour and “for” salvation through the church. And let *sōtērian* (translated: salvation) mean at minimum rescue from death and rescue for life.

Paul has introduced the “both and” pattern of covenant membership (see 1:14 and 1:15 above) without further word on the *how* or the *why*. He wrote of Greeks “both and” barbarians as covenant members. For the Greeks salvation presumably meant (further) rescue from death, for the barbarians salvation presumably meant rescue for life. Miraculous power indeed God is for this “both and” of salvation, of covenant membership. More than one and not the other! In terms of the question of *how*, part of the answer is by God’s power.

everyone . to the . faithful . Jewish . both . first . and . Greek .

God’s power combined with faith completes the question of *how* that Paul had raised in 1:14 (see above). It was Greeks both and barbarians to covenant membership by faith. And now Paul steps back further in new creation history. Jewish Christians were first to believe. Assume the (faithful) Jewish were Christians and the Greeks were not. And then, Jewish Christians “both and” Greeks are Christian covenant members. Paul has not explained the *why* yet, but the *how* has now been addressed. Jewish Christians “both and” Greeks are covenant members by God’s power and by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:17

righteousness . indeed . God . in/on/among . themselves . revealed .

dikaiosynē (translated: righteousness and/or justice) indeed; Paul writes, and continues with explanation.

Let three aspects of *dikaiosynē* be considered important:

- a) Let *dikaiosynē* (here in proximity with *theou*) be God’s own faithfulness to the covenant, per N.T. Wright’s definition of *dikaiosynē theou* in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. “Indeed,” functions as an emphasis and also to continue with the preceding argument; and in particular of God’s power.
- b) Let Jesus be the image of *dikaiosynē* indeed.⁶

⁵ For a related article on the gospel, see in particular, N.T. Wright’s *Gospel and theology in Galatians* (Wright, N.T., 1994).

- c) Let *dikaiosynē* mean the covenant people of God indeed. Again, “indeed” functions as an emphasis and also to connect to the preceding argument: of the new creation history of Greeks both and barbarians, of Jews both and Greeks (see 1:14 and 1:16 above).

In the context of the subsequent words *en autō* (translated: in/on/among themselves), let (b) and (c) be the emphasis of the verse; because of (a).

And then, *apokalyptetai*.⁷

out from . faith . to/into/for . faith .

Out from the faith of Jesus; and Christian Jews (both first and), Christian Greeks (both) and Christian barbarians. And in this manner forward in spirit also to those in Rome. And each time “*eis* salvation” (see 1:16 above) and here expressed as “*eis* faith.”

as . it is written . The . and . righteous . out from . faith . will live .

Let “The” refer to Jesus.⁸ So that Jesus and the covenant members (people of God) out from him will live.

Reflection

In 1:14-17, Paul has referred to Jesus as the righteous one who is Lord. *Melchizadek* (translated: my King is righteousness), is the name of the person in Genesis 14:18-20 Abraham tithed to. In the context of tithing (see the *Discussion* below, “Tithing”), this is important and perhaps revelatory. *Melchizadek* served bread and wine to Abraham, who tithed. Jesus resembled *Melchizadek* and the church serves the Eucharist in remembrance of Jesus.

Discussion

Tithing

Perhaps debt (in the form of tithes) was a practical matter at the frontline of a debate about covenant membership. Under the law, the Levitical priesthood collected tithes from covenant members (see Hebrews 7:5). Post Jesus’ cross and resurrection, Christians were covenant members (and not under the law) and non-Christians were not covenant members. In this scenario, tithes may have been inappropriately sought. If so, Paul has swiftly undercut the practical matter of tithes with the fundamental matter of covenant membership.

Paul’s manner

Paul’s manner towards those in Rome is clear. He expresses grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7). He prays for them and he longs to see them, to impart a spiritual gift (*charisma pneumatikon*) for their strengthening and he wants to be encouraged together (1:9-12).

⁶ In particular, consider 1 Corinthians 15:45, “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” (NRSV).

⁷ *apokalyptetai*, as closely associated with the gospel.

⁸ Paul has stepped back to the start of new creation history.

Presumably, this was the manner of Christians unto Saul. The word *houtōs* functions as a kind of pivot point, referring both backwards and forwards in new creation (see 1:15 above). So those Paul persecuted “both and” Paul are covenant members. And presumably the manner of the Christians unto Saul was of grace and peace.

The barbarian foolish

On the Road to Damascus Saul’s manner was that of a barbarian and a fool. Paul was a Jew, a Pharisee and a Roman citizen, but his manner was barbaric per the “vices and savage natures” definition above (see 1:14 above). With the “as to me” in 1:15, Paul perhaps intends to name his former behavior toward Christians that of a barbarian. As a non-covenant member attacking covenant members and perhaps over covenant membership in particular, he was “foolish.” If so, he has presumably named those he persecuted as Greek Christians.

Paul’s “forward in Spirit also to you” also (see 1:15 above), also perhaps intends the mention of resonances of the word “barbarian” for others.

References

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Appendix

N.T. Wright's definition of *dikaiosynē theou*

Within the context *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, N.T. Wright provides a preliminary summary statement of the meaning of *dikaiosynē theou*, often translated 'the righteousness of God' (Wright, N.T., 2013, p.841) (italics original).

"I suggest that we are bound, in the light of all that has gone before, in the light of all the biblical texts which Paul is implicitly evoking (which I explored in chapter 2 above), and in the light of the climax and conclusion of Paul's present argument (4.1-25), to understand *dikaiosynē theou*:

- a) as God's own 'righteousness' (rather than a status of 'righteousness' granted, imputed or otherwise given to humans);
- b) as God's own 'righteousness' with the focus, very specifically, on his *covenant faithfulness* in the sense of 'doing what he promised to Abraham, in Deuteronomy, in the Psalms, and through Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel';
- c) as God's own 'righteousness' in the sense of his faithfulness to *the covenant promise to bless the nations through Israel*. Out beyond this again – though without skipping stages, still less cancelling them out! – there is the sense that the divine faithfulness to the *covenant* is the appointed means of the divine faithfulness to the *creation*."