

The argument of Romans 1:14-17

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Introduction

The paper explores the argument of Romans 1:14-17. Assumptions are stated at outset and then developed further.

Starting with 1:14 the Greeks are assumed to be Christian covenant members already. "Greeks both and barbarians" is assumed to be a covenant membership scenario pattern. Then Christian theology is introduced to identify Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit as central in each covenant membership scenario pattern.

Assumptions

- i. Let the "Greeks" of 1:14 be covenant members already.
- ii. Let the three "both and" phrases in 1:14-16 be covenant membership scenario patterns¹:
 - a. Pattern 2a, "Greeks both and barbarians",
 - b. Pattern 2b, "wise both and foolish" and
 - c. Pattern 1, "Jewish both first and Greek",
- iii. Let Pattern 2b elaborate on Pattern 2a.
- iv. Let Paul identify the operation of God's power in 1:16 without naming "the gospel" as God's power in particular.²
- v. Let Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit be the image of dikaiosynē Theou in Christian covenant members.³
- vi. Let en autō of 1:17 (translated "in themselves") be the beginning of Paul's reference to Habakkuk 2:4.

1:14

Pattern 2a				Pattern 2b					
Hellēsin	te	kai	Barbarois	sophois	te	kai	anoētois	opheiletēs	eimi
Greeks	both	and	Barbarians	wise	both	and	foolish	indebted	I am

¹ The three covenant membership scenario patterns in 1:14-16 appear to be rhetorical instruments particular to the time when Paul wrote the epistle, in order to: name the pre-Christian identity of the church member(s), identify the order of church membership and identify that both are covenant members.

² Note that most recent English translations of the Bible have identified the gospel as God's power in particular.

³ Note that most recent English translations of the Bible have identified the dikaiosynē Theou in the gospel.

Let the “Greeks” be covenant members already (see *Assumptions i.*). Let “Greeks both and barbarians” be a covenant membership scenario pattern, named here as Pattern 2a (see *Assumptions ii. a.*).

Let “wise both and foolish” be a covenant membership scenario pattern, Pattern 2b (see *Assumptions ii. b.*). Pattern 2b elaborates on Pattern 2a such that Paul draws-out the corresponding Greek and barbarian stereotypes of Greeks as “wise” and barbarians as “foolish” (see *Assumptions iii.*). Covenant members are “wise”.

The “wise” and “foolish” stereotypes match Paul’s own scenario on the Road to Damascus, per *Pattern 2b for Paul* (see next).

“Indebted I am” writes Paul, with the “foolish” label for himself.⁴

Pattern 2b for Paul:

For Paul, Pattern 2b occurred on the Road to Damascus.⁵ Consider a Stage 1 and Stage 2 as follows. In Stage 1, the “wise” covenant members that Paul sought to persecute were ek pisteōs (translated: “(out) from faithfulness”) already. In Stage 2, “wise” both and “foolish” (Paul) were covenant members ek pisteōs.

What has happened from Stage 1 to Stage 2? Understood through the lens of Christian theology, the following has occurred. In Stage 1, Jesus Christ was in “wise” covenant members by Holy Spirit. In Stage 2, Jesus Christ was in Paul (see e.g. Acts 9:10-19) by Holy Spirit.

1:15

houtōs	to	kat’	eme			
in this manner	the	according to	me			
prothymon	kai	hymin	tois	en	Rhōmē	euangelisasthai
eager	also	to you	the	in	Rome	to preach the gospel

Let houtōs to kat’ eme refer to *Pattern 2b for Paul* (see 1:14 above) and Paul’s revelation.

With “eager also”, Paul now writes with the bearing of the “wise” as he preaches the gospel to “the in Rome”.

⁴ Granted the covenant membership scenario patterns of 1:14, opheiletēs has here been used in the context of covenant membership. Consider Rom. 4:3 with logizetai dikaiosynēn (translated: “reckoned [or credits, etc.] righteousness”). Consider also the discussion of Heb. 7.

⁵ See e.g. Acts 9, Gal. 1 and 1 Cor. 15.

Paul refers to “the in Rome” as “barbarians” or “foolish”,⁶ in the context of Pattern 2a or Pattern 2b for “the in Rome”. Since “to you the in Rome” does not specify a people, it also accommodates Jewish people in Rome.

1:16

ou	gar	epaischynomai	to	euangelion	dynamis	gar	Theou	estin
not	indeed	I am ashamed of	the	gospel	power	indeed	of God	is

					Pattern 1				
eis	sōtērian	panti	tō	pisteuonti	oudaiō	te	prōton	kai	Hellēni
into	salvation	everyone	the	faithful	Jewish	both	first	and	Greek

“not indeed I am ashamed of the gospel [of the Christ],”⁷ Paul writes.⁸ Paul develops an explanation with the subsequent “indeed” statements continuing through to 1:18.

“power indeed of God is into salvation”, Paul continues. Let Paul identify the operation of God’s power in 1:16 as “into salvation”, without naming “the gospel” as God’s power in particular (see *Assumptions iv.*).

This “salvation” comprised “everyone the faithful” already. With, “Jewish both first and Greek”, Paul names the new creation people and summarises the original radical Christian covenant membership scenario pattern. See *Pattern 1 for the Greek* next.

Pattern 1 for the Greek:

Consider Pattern 1 for the Greek. In Stage 1, Jewish Christians were covenant members ek pisteōs (translated: “(out) from faithfulness”) already. In Stage 2, Jewish both (first) and Greek were covenant members ek pisteōs.

What has happened from Stage 1 to Stage 2? Understood through the lens of Christian theology, the following has occurred. In Stage 1, Jesus Christ was in Jewish covenant members first by Holy Spirit. (Jewish people were the first to believe in Jesus Christ.) In Stage 2, Jesus Christ was in the Greek by Holy Spirit.

⁶ The articulation of Greek and Roman historical context for Pattern 2a is beyond the scope of the commentary. Suffice to say let “Greeks” refer to Romans as “barbarians.” Before the ancient Greeks were conquered by the Romans, the Greeks referred to foreigners (including the Romans) as “barbarians”. See for example the meanings of Barbarian, in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. , 2017), retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/barbarian> on 11th January 2019. Consider also the onomatopoeic “barbarian” for a person who speaks in tongues in 1 Cor 14:11.

⁷ Other manuscripts have “of the Christ”.

⁸ Paul has announced the gospel in 1:3-5.

1:17

dikaiosynē gar Theou en auto apokalyptetai ek pisteōs
righteousness indeed of God in themselves revealed (out) faithfulness
from
eis pistin kathōs gegraptai ho de dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai
into faith as it is written the and righteous (out) faithfulness will live
from

Let Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit be the image of dikaiosynē Theou in Christian covenant members (see *Assumptions v.*).⁹ “indeed” continues the argument of 1:16 such that en autō (translated “in themselves”) refers to the “Jewish both first and Greek” covenant members. Let en autō also be the beginning of Paul’s reference to Habakkuk 2:4 (see *Assumptions vi.*).¹⁰ “revealed,” Paul writes, from the Greek apokalyptetai; and continues, “(out) from faithfulness into faith”.

“as it is written” in Habakkuk 2:4, “the and righteous (out) from faithfulness will live”. With *Pattern 1 for the Greek* in mind (see 1:16 above) “the” refers to the Jewish Christians who were covenant members first ek pisteōs and “righteous (out) from faithfulness” refers to the Greek Christians who were also covenant members ek pisteōs.¹¹ eis pistin (translated: “into faith”) has (already) happened.¹²

Paul omits the final mou present in the Septuagint of Habakkuk 2:4, translated [(out) from faithfulness] “of me”. In this way, Paul turns attention away from himself and emphasises the “Jewish both first and Greek” covenant members before him.

Conclusion

The paper explored the argument of Romans 1:14-17. Assumptions were stated at outset and then developed further.

Starting with 1:14 the Greeks were assumed to be Christian covenant members already. “Greeks both and barbarians” was assumed to be a covenant membership scenario pattern. Then Christian theology was introduced to identify Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit as central in each covenant membership scenario pattern.

⁹ dikaiosynē Theou has commonly been translated the “righteousness” or “justice” of God. For a summary statement on the meaning of dikaiosynē Theou as God’s own faithfulness to the covenant, see Wright, N.T., *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 841.

¹⁰ en autō precedes ho de dikaios ek pisteōs in the Septuagint of Habakkuk 2:4.

¹¹ Alternatively, in the context of *Pattern 2b for Paul* (see 1:14 above), “the” refers to the “wise” Christian covenant members and “righteous (out) from faithfulness” refers to Paul.

¹² Nevertheless, per 1:6-15, Paul has “the in Rome” in prayer as he preaches the gospel.