

Romans 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Analysis

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This verse introduces the epistle's central theme. *Dikaiosynē gar theou en autō apokaluptetai* (δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται, 'for the righteousness of God is revealed in it') is the theological linchpin. *Dikaiosynē theou* (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, righteousness of God) is debated: Is it God's attribute (His righteous character), or the righteousness He provides to believers (imputed righteousness)? The context favors both—God's righteousness is displayed in providing righteousness to the unrighteous through Christ's atoning work.

Apokaluptetai (ἀποκαλύπτεται, is revealed) is present tense—ongoing revelation in gospel preaching. *Ek pisteōs eis pistin* (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, 'from faith to faith') is cryptic. Possible meanings:

1. from God's faithfulness to human faith
2. from beginning to end by faith alone, or
3. from one degree of faith to another.

Most likely, it emphasizes faith as the sole instrument from start to finish—salvation is by faith, through faith, unto faith. Paul anchors this in Habakkuk 2:4: *ho de dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai* (ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται, 'the righteous shall live by faith')—the rallying cry of the Reformation, emphasizing justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).

Historical Context

Habakkuk 2:4, written circa 600 BC during Babylonian threat, promised that the righteous would survive by faithfulness/faith. Paul applies this prophetically to eschatological salvation through faith in Christ. The Reformers (Luther, Calvin) rediscovered Romans 1:17 as the antidote to medieval works-righteousness. Luther's 'tower experience' came through meditating on 'the righteousness of God' as gift, not demand. This verse sparked theological revolution, recovering the gospel of grace.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does 'the righteousness of God' (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) as both attribute and gift shape your understanding of salvation?
2. What does it mean practically to 'live by faith' (ἐκ πίστεως ζάω) in daily decisions, trials, and relationships?
3. Where are you tempted to supplement faith with works, morality, or religious performance to secure your standing before God?

Interlinear Text

δικαιοσύνη	γὰρ	θεοῦ	ἐν	αὐτῷ	ἀποκαλύπτεται	ἐκ	
the righteousness	For	of God	therein	G846	is	by	
G1343	G1063	G2316	G1722		G601	G1537	
πίστεως	εἰς	πίστεως	καθὼς	γέγραπται	Ὁ	δὲ	δίκαιος
faith	to	faith	as	it is written	G3588	G1161	The just
G4102	G1519	G4102	G2531	G1125			G1342
ἐκ	πίστεως	ζήσεται					
by	faith	shall live					
G1537	G4102	G2198					

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 2:4 (Faith): Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Galatians 3:11 (Faith): But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Hebrews 10:38 (Faith): Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Philippians 3:9 (Faith): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Romans 9:30 (Faith): What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Romans 3:21 (Righteousness): But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Romans 3:3 (Faith): For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

John 3:36 (Faith): He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

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