

A STAR FOR MARTIN LUTHER

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Martin Luther performed a service for all German speaking folks when he translated the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures into German. As a translation it is quite good, in fact it is a marvel. Most passages are true to the Greek and Hebrew originals, yet the German rendering is quite German as well. A remarkable achievement.

However, there are some passages which could be improved. We shall not dwell upon these, instead we shall examine three passages in the text of Romans; actually three identical phrases. They seized my attention as each passage is not properly rendered in any translation since Luther's! No English translation has translated the Greek properly—not Tyndale, nor the King James company, nor the revisers, nor any of the modern versions, nor any of the ancient versions. It would appear that only Luther's German translation and the original Greek preserve the original wording or meaning.¹ (Although I have not examined all of the several hundred English translations made since the Geneva Bible). Unfortunately, the Gothic version does not contain this portion of Romans.

Luther had no real precedent, there were about 17 German Bible translations made before Luther's, but they were all based upon the Latin, and in our passages under review—the Latin versions all error. Luther translated directly from the Greek and Hebrew. Thus, when I observed Luther's translation here, I was very impressed. He must have given some thought to his rendering, for he repeats it in the identical Greek portions as well. We are discussing Romans 1:16 and also Romans 2:9, 10. Luther understood what the

context pointed to, he also perfectly understood Paul here. It is amazing that so many others have not, and have long perpetuated a false teaching or understanding.

Actually, we are only concerned with five Greek words, a phrase if you will. Here is how the text appears at Romans 1:16 in the Greek: [the exact same five words/phrase is repeated at 2:9 and 10]

ου γαρ επαισχυνομαι το ευαγγελιον του χριστου δυναρις
γαρ θεου εστιν εις σωτηριαν παντι τω πιστευοντι
Ιουδαιω τε πρωτον και ελληνι

In the above, the relevant phrase is highlighted. Typically it is translated as:

"...to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (wherein the Greek πρωτον is treated as an adjective, "first", and τε is rendered as "and")

But not so with Luther! he understood the context, and he also recognized the style and habits of both Paul and the scribe of this epistle, Tertius. (For more detailed information on this text and its translation history see my essay "AN EVALUATION OF THE PHRASE Τε Πρωτον και AS FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT" which is posted on the website: www.Biblical-data.org).

Here is Luther's rendering in his 1534 edition:

Denn ich scheme mich des Euangelion von Christo nicht/denn es ist eine krafft Gottes/ die da selig machet/alle/die daran glauben/ die Jüden furnemlich vnd auch die Griechen/ Sintemal darinnen offenbaret wird die gerechtigkeit/ die für Gott gilt/ welche kömpt aus* glauben jnn glauben/ wie denn geschriben stehet/ Der Ge- rechte wird seines glaubens leben.

The highlighted portion is our phrase of interest. Luther did not perceive the Greek $\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\nu$ as "first", instead he saw it correctly as an adverb; he rendered the Greek word with *furnemlich*! By doing so, he was becoming one of the very few translators of any version to accurately convey the precise meaning Paul intended!

Most German dictionaries will not show *furnemlich*, it is an obsolete form in the modern German language. Modern German would read *vornemlich*. Immediately it is recognized as an adverb by its suffix *-lich*. Its root word is *vornehm* (note: some dictionaries wrongly place this adverb under *vornehmen* which is an error). *Vornehm* is not a common adjective in the German language, but most Germans recognize the meaning of the adverb, *vornemlich*, it means "nobly" as well as:

(1) especially, or

(2) chiefly, or

(3) principally (also "primarily")

Consequently Luther's translation would read in English as:

"...to the Jew especially and also to the Greek" — or,

"...to the Jew especially and likewise to the Greek" — or,

"...especially to the Jew and likewise to the Greek" — or,

"...especially to the Jew and certainly to the Greek" — or,

"...primarily to the Jew and the Greek"

Most native Germans would agree that each of the above is a possible translation into English. *Auch* can be rendered as: "certainly", "indeed", "likewise", "also" and "too". The adverb "especially" (*vornemlich*) seems to have no fixed position in the English translation. It modifies "it makes salvation" (*selig macht*). Since it modifies the transitive verb "makes", it applies equally to both elements to which the verb has as objects—to both believing Jews and Greeks, or; "especially to both Jew and Greek".

Technically this is an adverb of manner or degree, which is insisted upon by its semantic import - "especially" or "primarily". Had Luther meant "first" or an adverb of time or sequence he would not have used this word!

Romans 2:9 and 10 contain the exact same Greek and German phrase,² though the primary verbs differ, instead of "makes salvation" we have "does evil" and "does good". Romans 1:16 and 2:9, 10 are contextualized, in part, by verse 11 of chapter 2, which immediately follows verses 9 and 10:

"For there is no partiality with God" [this is clear, yes?]

No one has a priority!³ No one has a seniority, all are on an equal basis today before God, all are sinners needing Christ Jesus. In light of this clear fact, the rendering as:

"...especially to the Jew and Greek" — or,
"...primarily to both the Jew and Greek"

is absolutely correct. Martin Luther in the early 1500s apparently saw and recognized this, perhaps we today can learn from Luther's translation here, and from the import of the Epistle to the Romans in general. Paul, in illuminating his revelations of the mystery, makes clear that in this age, the Israelite is as the Gentile, no more favored-nation status.

END NOTES

¹ For reference purposes, we may note the following: in Bengel's *Gnomen*, of 1862, page 20, Bengel correctly recognizes Paul's meaning here, "...the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, no more to the believing Jew, than to the Greek".

Winer's, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, [editor: Thayer, 1874], on page 576, states: "When in the combination τε...και α πρωτον is inserted after τε, as in Rom. 1:16; 2:9f., it means *especially, chiefly*."

In opposition to the above, as well as opposing T. Zahn, is the popular commentary by Cranfield [vol 1, pages 90f.]. Cranfield believes Zahn's interpretation (and this present paper's) view to be "quite unlikely" [note 2, page 91]. In my much fuller essay on Τε Πρωτον και, I elaborate more on Zahn's view, which view is in concord with my own.

² In Romans 2:9, the words for "Greek" and "Jew", are in the genitive case.

³ the barbarians mentioned in this epistle, lacked the status or knowledge of the cultured Jews and Greeks, they *were* typically unaware of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Thus, no "especially" is applied to them; the "especially" does contrast them with the Jews and Greeks mentioned in our three passages. The Jews and Greeks knew of the Scriptures and of Israel's God, hence they had less excuse—they were especially aware of Paul's message and intent, and especially liable to faith.