

Biblical Interpretation and Christian Faith: A Case Study of Romans 1:17b

Abstract

This paper compares the Chinese rendering of Romans 1:17b, “The just shall live by faith” (KJV), in five different Bible versions: The Chinese Union Version, Today’s Chinese Version, the Lu Chen-Chung Version, the Catholic Studium Biblicum Version, and the Recovery Version. This paper also compares the Reformed and Catholic understandings of righteousness and how those understandings are reflected in the Chinese translation of the Greek word *zao* (to live). Based on such a case study, this paper attempts to explore the practice of Bible translation and its impact on the Christian faith.

Furthermore, this paper takes note of the fact that in the book of Romans the apostle Paul used the Greek word *gar* (“for”, “because”) more than a hundred times and another Greek word *oun* (“what then”, “then”) more than forty times. By using these words, Paul is like a solemn prosecuting attorney delivering God’s condemnation on the people of the world and declaring, “*For* all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, KJV). He is also like an attorney for the defense, passionately declaring that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law and asking, “Do we *then* make void the law through faith? God forbid” (3:31, KJV). Most occurrences of *gar* and *oun* in the Greek text are not translated in the Chinese Union Version. Did the translators choose to ignore these words in the pursuit of *elegance* over *faithfulness* and *expressiveness*, the three well-known components of a proper Chinese translation? In order to thoroughly grasp the lively picture in the book of Romans, there is a need to go to the next level. Paul used these two Greek words to bring the readers to a higher level of the goal of God’s salvation.

Key words: Romans 1:17, justification, Bible translation, Bible interpretation