

AN EVALUATION OF THE PHRASE  
Τε Πρωτον και  
AS FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This innocent appearing phrase occurs just three times in the entire Greek Bible (the Septuagint and the New Testament). The three occurrences are all found in the epistle to the saints in Rome—Romans. Traditionally, virtually all English translations translate these three words in an identical fashion; "...to (or, of) the Jew first and also to (or, of) the Greek". These translations are also traditionally supported by most commentators, there are a few exceptions, this exegete is one. I would like to present to you why I suspect that the traditional translations should be reconsidered, and that *no Jewish priority* is implied.

At first glance, the usual renditions seem quite justified as these quotes from the *New American Standard Bible* will appear. The three texts are of Romans 1:16, 2:9,10:

ROM 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

ROM 2:9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, **of the Jew first and also of the Greek,** 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

By simply focusing upon just these three passages and ignoring the context, most observers would assert that indeed, the Jew has a historical priority and that the three phrases (in bold) are perfectly legitimate. It is agreed that historically, God did select Israel *first*, but this is not the meaning generated by our passages in their proper contexts. Instead Paul is focusing upon another element, one which is not concerned with sequence, rather the text is concerned with illuminating no type of priority or partiality.

Hence, the context shall play a vital role in my evaluation, we shall also note the Greek grammar involved, and basic semantics. First an analysis of the basic words in our phrase: τε, και and πρωτον.

Τε is a basic enclitic particle. It can serve as a simple conjunction "and" which often is used to connect clauses and can connect singular concepts. When used in conjunction with και it incorporates various nuances of meaning, such as contrast and coördination, it can be translated as "both" when used in conjunction

with καί. Often we find τε used as a simple connective in a series, καί is similarly used in this manner as well. In each of the three texts under discussion we find τε used with καί, and a resultant meaning could be "...both...and...", as we are dealing here with only two elements, Jews and Greeks. For a fine presentation of this little Greek particle the definition in BAGD's lexicon will suffice.<sup>1</sup>

Τε is used a total of 215 times in the NT. It is found most often in the Lucan corpus, it occurs 25 times in Paul's epistles, 18 times in Romans alone. Of its 215 occurrences, 35 occur as—τε [some inserted word] καί. Quite often τε is translated as a simple conjunction "and", but in 37 of its NT occurrences it is rendered as "both" (in the NASB). As mentioned when used with another conjunction, its meaning will vary. In our three passages, it is used with another conjunction "and" - καί, and only two elements are coördinated.

Our text has an inserted word between our two conjunctions. The word is πρωτον, and if we include the whole clause from Romans 1:16, (including the "...to the Jew first and also to the Greek.") our Greek text would appear as such:

...Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι

Πρωτον (which is usually rendered as "first" in our three passages) can have several meanings depending upon its context. Quite often in Greek it represents the ordinal "first", which would indicate some sort of a sequence. As an ordinal it would typically be construed as an adjective. This is its most common usage in the NT. However, it also occurs as an adverb denoting such concepts as "chiefly", "primarily", "mainly" or "especially". Too, as an adverb it can indicate "before", and even "earlier"! In our three texts under review, I treat it as an adverb, not as an adjective denoting several elements in sequence. As an adverb it can denote degree, and I would suggest rendering it as "especially" in each of our three passages. Not only does this accord with the context (as I shall reveal) but with the habit of this amanuensis (scribe, Tertius, Romans 16:22).

Καί, the third member of our phrase, is primarily a simple conjunction, often denoting the common "and". It can have an ascensive denotation which would equate it with "even"; but linked with τε it serves in its conjunctive capacities. Hence, "also" or "and" would be the two most prominent translations as regards our

phrase(s). When we do encounter a series of correlations, we will usually encounter multiple και(s) used with a τε. In Acts 9:15, for example we find several τε(s) used with a και. In our three texts an extended [using multiple τε(s) and και(s)] series is not present as only two elements are correlated.

Perceiving our word πρωτον as an adverb is amply justified. A glance at any exhaustive concordance will reveal that it is often rendered as a superlative (which it actually is of the preposition προ). In the NASB it is rendered as: "foremost", "chief", "first importance", and as "first" (127x) *et al.* My "especially" though unique is similar to most of the other adverbial types, translated as such it is also clearly a superlative.

At Matthew 6:33 we have a good NT example of its superlative/adverbial function, note this in the NASB:

MATT 6:33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

Here, "seek especially" is possibly a clearer translation. Acts 3:26 is also a fine passage in which "especially" is well suited:

ACT 3:26 For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (NASB)

In the above text, Peter is addressing Israelites and proselytes, it can be argued that "especially" is fine here as well as the usual "first". Each of the above NT samples were suggested in BAGD's lexicon on page 726, (s.v. 2c) in which each of our three texts in Romans are also offered as candidates for using πρωτον in its adverbial sense as "especially".

This is not at all an unusual or unique usage (i.e. as "especially" or even as "primarily"). Note this text from the apocryphal Tobit 4:12:

πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ, παιδίον, ἀπό πάσης πορνείας καὶ γυναῖκα πρώτον λαβὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ σπέρματος τῶν πατέρων σου... "Watch yourself child, avoid all pornographies; and especially (be careful) to take a woman from the seed of your fathers..." [from his father's tribe].

This marrying a woman from his father's tribe is an important theme of Tobit, and a word like "especially" is well suited for the translation.

Examples of rendering τε και as "both and" are abundant, especially when only two elements are mentioned. However in numerous cases the word "both" can seem redundant, as the passage itself can clearly illustrate that only two elements are involved. Note this passage from Aristotle (in his *Art of Rhetoric*, Loeb edition, page 30): <sup>2</sup>

Λέγω γὰρ διαλεκτικούς τε καὶ ῥητορικούς συλλογισμούς... "I say for both dialectical and rhetorical syllogisms...".

In the above edition (Loeb) the translator leaves out "both" and unlike my translation above, Freese renders it as such: "I mean by dialectical and rhetorical syllogisms...". At times omitting the "both" (usually the Greek word τε) is quite permissible, but its retention can add clarity and is even required in many texts.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, (Allyn and Bacon's edition, 1894, page 41)<sup>3</sup> we note:

...ὁ πάντων μεγίστον τε κακὸν καὶ ἐσχάτον ἐστὶ, ...which of all [evils] is both [the] greatest and lowest evil. (here, Socrates speaks of the illusion of perception, which illusion is the "greatest evil").

Do note the inserted adjective κακὸν which applies to both of the elements, "greatest" and "lowest", which themselves are both adjectives.

In the LXX our two words are also fairly common; one example would be from Genesis 3:8,

...καὶ ἐκρυβήσαν ὁ τε Ἄδὰμ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ... ...and they hid, both the Adam and his wife.

In this quote we note an apparent inserted noun Ἄδὰμ, but often the τε is inserted between the noun and its article. Below in a papyrus from Egypt<sup>4</sup>, dated 13 BC. we read,

...μισθ[ον] τοῦ τε γαλακτος καὶ τῆς τροφείας... ...reward both of the milk and of the food...

Thousands of other examples could be given, but it is hoped that these few will make obvious the widespread use of τε και as two words illustrating some correlation between concepts. In the above examples and in our three passages, which we are analyzing, the correlation is only between two words, thus "both.. and" ensues. As mentioned, in many of our English translations we may not find the word "both" exhibited, due to an oversight, or that its presence was obvious and did not require translation. I try to retain it as it clarifies the relationship between the two concepts. The following are examples where English translators have **deleted** the word "both" which **is in** the Greek manuscripts.

Hebrews 5:14, ...trained to discern BOTH good AND evil.  
Acts 24:3 ...in BOTH every way AND everywhere  
Acts 15:32 ...and BOTH Judas AND Silas  
James 3:7 ...BOTH of beast AND of bird.. BOTH of reptile AND sea creature.  
Hebrews 10:33 ...being BOTH opposed AND persecuted.

As the reader should by now deduce, I would include the "both" in our three texts under discussion—Romans 1:16 and 2:9,10. Further, of course, I would render the usual "first" as "especially" as has been prior noted.

Before progressing, it might be best to here exhibit the three passages as I would translate them,

ROMANS 1:16 - For I am not being shamed. For the good-news is power of God for the purpose of salvation to all who believe, especially to both Jews and Greeks.[note punctuation!]

ROMANS 2:9,10 - Distress and pressure upon every human soul who is generating the evil, especially of both Jew and Greek; but glory and honor and peace to all those generating the good, especially to both Jew and Greek.

The above three texts are relatively free of major variants in the Greek witnesses. However, I should note the fact that Marcion apparently, did remove "especially" [πρωτον] from Romans 1:16. If he did, it was probably due to several reasons. Either he perceived it as a word which gave the Jew some sort of superior position, or, he may have removed it so that others may not be tempted to treat this word as an adjective—ordinal number. We do know that Marcion did not have much empathy for the Jews nor for YHWH of the Old Testament. Several manuscripts (B,

G, Tertullian and the Sahidic version of Egypt) delete the word, consequently the word may not be original. From this possible excision attributed to Marcion, we can only infer that possibly he too reckoned *πρωτον* as an ordinal adjective, if so he misunderstood the intent of Paul in the overall context. Marcion would not be alone in this probable error.

Among modern commentators the common view of Israel having a priority is seen in the writings of Cranfield, Charles Hodge, A.T. Robertson, J. P. Lange and most others. Those with a "middle-of-the-road" view are Lenski and H. A. W. Meyer. Those which concur with my view are Dr. George Winer via Thayer's edition of his grammar.<sup>5</sup> Winer agrees at least that *πρωτον* should be rendered as "chiefly" or "especially". Yet more fully in compliance with my proposal is Theodor Zahn, he sees the larger picture. Zahn agrees that Marcion may have omitted *πρωτον* at 1:16 as it was embarrassing; he also recognizes the true use of the word for "Greek" [*Ἑλληνι*] instead of its use as "Gentile" or "nation". Zahn further states:<sup>6</sup>

certainly in Romans i.-ix. we do not find any development of the idea that the gospel is a power of God unto salvation in a higher degree or sooner in the case of believing Jews than of believing Gentiles. On the contrary, up to x. 12 the whole argument is to show that, with respect to the divine judgment and in regard to the way of salvation, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

The versions are of limited help here. Both the Latin and the Peshitta Syriac version render *πρωτον* as an adverb. The Latin translates it with "primum" in all three passages, hence "first" as in a sequence. The Peshitta uses *ܩܪܝܢܐ* in all three passages, which also indicates a sequence. "Both" may not be expressed, or it may be translated as the erroneous "and". The Sahidic has *ϣοϣπ* ("first" or "earliest"); none of these versions correctly (in my opinion) express the original Greek semantics.

In my long meditations and studies upon this phrase, I have come to a conclusion, one which may indeed be a grammatical precept! Most traditional commentators do not recognize the significance of the subtle position of the adverb as between the conjunctions. Throughout the long history of the Greek language, we will note various words inserted between these two words, *τε...και*. We find a variety of parts of speech inserted; nouns, verbs, participles [Acts 8:28], adjectives, and adverbs.

I have determined that when an adjective or adverb is inserted between the two, and when only two elements are being correlated, then the adverb or adjective modifies or applies to both elements. This does not apply when a noun, name, participle, or verb is the inserted word. We note that an adverb or adjective can also follow both the correlated elements and still modify both, but when it occurs between the τε και it may add emphasis. These examples may serve to validate my preliminary findings:

Acts 2:43, we find the noun "wonders" inserted, and obviously as a noun it does not modify the other element - "signs".

Luke 21:11, has the adjective "great" and it does apply to both "earthquakes" AND "famines", though it is not usually recognized as such. This particular text is riddled with variants, but the concept I am illustrating remains.

Acts 8:13, Nestles Greek NT, on other hand, has the adjective "great" following both elements here, it does not modify both "signs" and "miracles", as "signs" is in the neuter, and "miracles" is feminine.

Acts 11:26, "...in Antioch the disciples were first [πρωτος] called Christians". Here only τε is found with the adverb "first". There is no next they were called.... No sequence.

One nice example outside of the NT, is found in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*,<sup>7</sup> III, xxxi, 5, which appears as such:

...τε παντελως νοθων και της αποστολικης ορθοδοξιας αλλοτριων εν τουτοις διειληφοτες...  
...being both thoroughly spurious and foreign as concerns apostolic orthodoxy; via these, division has occurred and yet remains...

We should note that the adverb "thoroughly" here applies to both "spurious" and "foreign", and that it occurs between our two conjunctions τε και.

Other examples of πρωτον used adverbially to indicate, "primarily" or "especially", can be found at: (these are each per my translation!)



Acts 28:7, ...the **leading** man...Publius,...

Luke 12:1, ...He began speaking **especially** to His disciples.

Acts 13:46, ...it had been being necessary that the word of (or, from, or, about) the God should be spoken **especially** to you (Jews)...

I Corinthians 11:18, For indeed, **most importantly**, when you come-together...

Romans 3:2 ... **especially** that they were entrusted...

Romans 15:24, ...when I have been **especially** satisfied by some of your company...

I Timothy 3:10, ...yet even these should be **especially** tested, then...

II Peter 1:20, But know this **especially**, that every prophecy...

II Peter 3:3, But know this **especially**...

Some of these may be best rendered with "primarily", I shall let the reader make the final decision.

In E. A. Sophocles' Lexicon (pages 958, 959, volume II)<sup>8</sup> we note the following compounded Greek words which incorporate an adverbial sense found in πρωτον: πρωτομαρτυς "first-class-martyr"; πρωτοπολιτης "chief-citizen; and πρωτοπαπας "chief-priest"; with little effort, others can be demonstrated.

From the above, I trust the reader will understand why the translation of πρωτον as "especially" is a very viable denotation, especially as used in our three passages. Recall, that the adjectival function of this word is much more common than its adverbial usage. As an adverb it cannot directly modify a noun, such as "Jew" or "Greek", but its influence is filtered through the verb and preposition/case to these nouns. In Romans 1:16, εστιν is the main verb; in 2:9 and 10 the main verb is probably omitted as it is understood, the NASB supplies "is" in italics. With our "especially" between τε και we should note somewhat of an emphasis towards the "Greek" and "Jew", something is **especially** directed toward them. In verse 16 of Romans 1, this "especially" is "salvation", and in 2:9 it would be "wrath, indignation, tribulation and distress".

Since, hopefully, my conclusions seem valid, why is it that most translators, commentators, and exegetes do not also attain to such conclusions? I posit that two reasons exist: one, they do not wish to "buck" tradition; and two, they do not understand the context. So it is now necessary to examine the context and by doing so we shall apply a nice conclusion to this evaluation.

First, the amanuensis of Romans, Tertius, uses *πρωτον* six times in this epistle:  
(each is per *my* translation)

- 1:8 - as "First" which could also be rendered as "**First of all**"
- 1:16 - as "**especially**"
- 2:9 - as "**especially**"
- 2:10 - as "**especially**"
- 3:2 - as "**especially**" or "**first of all**"
- 15:24 - as "**especially**" or "**after**"

I am not going to dogmatically insist that each of the above renditions is final, some room for disagreement exists, but it must be fairly asserted that this scribe did perceive Paul's inspired words as often denoting an adverbial quality, and not as an ordinal adjective. The adjectival usage may occur at 1:8, but no secondary or sequential statements follow which would justify the usage of *πρωτον* as denoting an ordinal as "first" in a sequence. Hence, we find that the adverbial usage seems to predominate in this scribe's writing.

*Τε* and *και*, occur in correlation, 10 times in Romans. In 1:27 *δε* may be the superior reading as opposed to *τε*, in which case we have nine usages of these two conjunctions used in a correlative manner in Romans. The NASB incorporates the word "both" in four of our nine passages (they are: 1:12, 1:14 [twice], and 3:9 ). It is omitted in our three passages under examination, and also at 1:20 and 10:12. When we view each of these nine passages, which have *τε και*, we should note that in each instance "both" is perfectly legitimate. Thus, grammatically and lexically, the context of the Roman epistle supports the consistent rendering of *τε...και*, as "both...and". [This also seems to be Tertius' habit.](#)

Further, the subject matter, in its natural, literal, progressive exposition also supports "both...and", and "especially". In chapter 1, Paul shows that **all** humans know right from wrong, some via the Mosaic code, and some via their conscience which God implanted. Those who have heard of the Mosaic code have **less** excuse, although they too are without excuse, if they do not perfectly follow the Law, then they too will suffer. Thus, both the "barbarian" (as seen in Romans 1:14), and the "Jew" and the "Greek" will be held accountable. In chapter 2, he (Paul) focuses more so upon the "Jew" (2:14, 17, 27). Note, that 1:16, 2:9,10 correlate the "Jew" and "Greek", *not* the Jew and Gentile *εθνος*. Indeed! for it is not the ancient

Chinese, or Incas, or Indians (of India), or Mayas, or any other "barbarians" which have been given the Law of Moses. Nor, were these ancient cultures included within the cultured Greek and Roman empires. They had their "own" law, Romans 1:19,20. When the Greeks incorporated Israel within their empire, in about 330 B.C., they like the Persians, learned of a YHWH and His Laws. The scattered Jews also promoted the Law in many regions of the Greek and Roman empires. From Babylon to Spain, from Alexandria to modern Romania, most everyone who could read Koine Greek, or who received a basic education, knew of Israel's Laws (to varying degrees). Thus, we read of the "Jews and Greeks" who are ESPECIALLY without excuse. They have more of a reason to know of YHWH's will, due to the spread of the Koine Greek, and due to their culture. They are especially subject to "salvation" if they respond to this God of the Scriptures. If they ignore his Word, they will especially experience His wrath! A priority does not occur however, for there is no partiality with God, all who do wrong will be judged. In Romans 1:18, suppressing the truth leads to consequences, but surely if the truth is clearly articulated, as it was in the Greek and Jewish worlds, then they would have less of an excuse. The law written within the barbarians (Romans 1:18-23) is only that which creation and nature reveals, but it is enough to point them clearly to God. The Greek and Jew generally have less of an excuse. That is the contextual meaning in Romans 1:16 and 2:9,10. Romans 3:1,2; states,

ROM 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

ROM 3:2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (each NASB)

These same oracles were learned by the conquering Greeks, and that is why the word for Greeks Ἕλληνι is used in our three verses (Romans 1:16, 2:9,10) and not the more general term for "nations" or "Gentiles" which could imply "barbarians" (ἔθνος).

In Acts 13:46, Paul demonstrates Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, this rejection is seen nearly every time he witnesses to Jews. It is seen in Acts 13:6 (of Elymas), at Acts 14:2, Acts 17:5, Acts 18:12, Acts 19:8, Acts 21:27 and finally the Jews of Rome in Acts 28:17-28. Often Paul began witnessing to the Jews con-

cerning the kingdom, and at times progressing onto elements peculiar to his gospel. But in each case what was clearly demonstrated **first** was the rejection by the Israelites of Paul's message. After each rejection scene, Gentiles believed, and even a few Jews. One is certainly hard pressed to prove that Paul would not witness to any Jews who would listen—Acts 9:15. Paul gives no priority to any ethnic group, nor to any color, nor to any gender (as far as witnessing goes). However, through Paul, God does demonstrate repeatedly, the rejection by (and of) Israel, and the turning to Gentiles. [This rejection precedes the acceptance of the Gentile listeners in nearly every location in which Paul journeyed.](#)

[This demonstrated rejection by God of His former people is first in history, God does not plan \(prophesy\) about rejecting another nation of His people next \(a sequence\). What must occur "first" is that Israel must first be cut off, and only then can we Gentiles be grafted on! \(per Romans 11\).](#) This cutting-off is a temporary "rejection" (see the language of Romans 11:15) ending at the "rapture". Acts 3:26 demonstrates the order in the *former* interrupted dispensation. Historically in the past, Israel did have a priority, but in this present dispensation Paul stresses that now no longer is there any type of a Jewish priority. Romans 1:16, 2:9,10 do not contradict Paul's teachings. Romans 2:11 is telling, (again as per *my* translation)

For [God] is not One-Who-receives-according-to-face [or, not One Who shows partiality] in the personal presence of God". The Greek reads: ου γαρ εστιν προσωποληψια παρα τω Θεω

Note, the above quote of Romans 2:11 immediately follows 2:9,10! This thought of *no partiality* also accords with the greater Pauline context, Colossians 3:25, and Ephesians 6:9; in agreement with Acts 10:34,35.

Unfortunately, the traditional translations seem to *inject* an unwarranted historical mode in our three passages. As prior stated, historically Israel did have a priority in that they were first to receive the oracles of God, and that God chose them to be His special people. (note Romans 9:4). But in Romans 1:16, 2:9,10, Paul is not illuminating any sort of historical priority. Nay, indeed, the context is showing that all humans are guilty before God, those who have the Law of Moses, and those who have a law written in their conscience (or heart).

Barbarians, Greeks, and Jews, all have some sort of a law. If any of these peoples fully keep this law, then they will gain eternal life (in a good place) as per Romans 2:7,10, and verse 13. Romans 3:12 further illuminates this progressive teaching, that *no one* does good, all fail. Only in Christ Jesus can any one hope to be saved. Romans 3:28 is clear:

For we consider [a] person to be justified by faith apart from works of law.

By not correctly absorbing the context, traditional exegetes and translators have perverted the preliminary teachings of Paul in Romans 1 and 2. Their translations of our three passages under investigation flatly contradict Romans 2:11! My observations remove this contradiction and restore the fluid, literal, contextual meaning. Romans 1:16 and 2:9,10 are not the texts to prove a Jewish priority, in fact just the opposite is clearly taught, the Jew and Greek and barbarian are on equal footing when standing before God as based upon their own apparent works. Romans 1:16, and 2:9,10 do show that the Greek and the Jew have less of an excuse, as the word of God has been spread abroad in their lands. Where there is no law (especially the Mosaic Law) there is no violation of the Law, and hence no sin as stated in:

Romans 4:15 (NASB),

for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

Romans 5:13 states (NASB),

ROM 5:13 for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

and of the conscience, James 4:17 (NASB),

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Thus is the testimony of Scripture. When the overall context is taken into consideration, my proposed translations for Romans 1:16 and 2:9,10 seem even more valid. It is not just a matter of linguistics, grammar or semantics, it is also one of the Biblical context. It is the hope of this brief effort that you dear reader, might also see the validity and consider—at least on equal footing—my effort with those of the traditional renditions.

ROMANS 1:16 - For I am not being shamed. For the good-news is power of God for the purpose of salvation to all who believe, especially to both Jews and Greeks.

ROMAN5 2:9,10 - Distress and pressure upon every human soul who is generating the evil, especially of both Jew and Greek; but glory and honor and peace to all those generating the good, especially to both Jew and Greek.



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