

## Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship

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Πίστις Χριστοῦ, a phrase quiet for centuries, has helped rouse broad theological issues hibernating since the Reformation. Its history, however, has been tame. Prior to the twentieth century, the phrase was almost universally understood to mean faith in Christ.<sup>1</sup> When Roy Harrisville searched the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* corpus for forms of the πίστις Χριστοῦ construction in the writings of the early church fathers, he found that the Fathers understood πίστις Χριστοῦ as objective in every case in which they clearly indicated the sense of the genitive.<sup>2</sup>

How soon did alternative interpretations appear? Ian Wallis looked for early allusions to Christ having faith and found that Athanasius countered the Arians by denying that Christ had faith. Apparently faith was considered a creaturely response to God, and Athanasius was concerned to preserve the deity of Christ. Those who followed Athanasius were then silent on the issue.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, therefore, the early church did not understand πίστις Χριστοῦ to mean “faith of Christ”. In fact, whether anyone interpreted πίστις Χριστοῦ as either “faith of Christ” or “faithfulness of Christ” before the eighteenth century is unknown at this point.

Today, however, the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ is debated rather than assumed. In the nineteenth century, a few scholars commented briefly on πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive, but Johannes Haußleiter gave it the first known substantial treatment in 1891. He insisted that πίστις Χριστοῦ was the faith in God that Christ maintained even in the face

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<sup>1</sup> At least thus far, no other view has been discovered from the time of the early church until well after the Reformation.

<sup>2</sup> Roy A. Harrisville, “ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: Witness of the Fathers”, *NovT* 36 (1994): 233–41.

<sup>3</sup> Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions* (SNTSMS 84; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 202–4, 210.

of the crucifixion.<sup>4</sup> Twentieth-century interest in πίστις Χριστοῦ began with Gerhard Kittel, who was heavily influenced by Hausleiter. Kittel's contention was that Paul nowhere speaks of faith in Christ as justifying anyone.<sup>5</sup> The debate lived and died among the Germans in the early part of the century; but Gabriel Hebert, working independently, resurrected the issue for the English-speaking world in the 1950s. T.F. Torrance immediately took Hebert's side, and after a brief sparring match between Torrance and C.F.D. Moule, James Barr stepped into the ring to deliver the final blow. But the final blow was aimed only at the poor lexical argument of Hebert and Torrance: the broader debate continued gaining momentum. When Markus Barth entered the discussion, he introduced it to its past by bringing Kittel and Hausleiter into the current debate and to its future by predicting the spate of books that would tear down much conventional Pauline scholarship, including its ideas on πίστις Χριστοῦ.<sup>6</sup>

The predicted books began arriving, and the number of people interested in πίστις Χριστοῦ multiplied. In particular, the publication of *The Faith of Jesus Christ* by Richard B. Hays in 1983 led to a debate between Hays and James Dunn, a proponent of the objective genitive, at the SBL conference in 1991. The body of scholarship, however, had already grown too large to take up at a single meeting. And it continues to grow. The arguments scholars offer generally fall into lexical, grammatical/syntactical, and theological categories.

## Lexical Arguments

When Hebert and Torrance wrote, their main argument, unlike Kittel's, was lexical. Torrance says, for example:

The usual translation of *'emeth* in the LXX is *aletheia*, but *aletheia* is not used to signify abstract or metaphysical truth, but what is grounded upon God's faithfulness, *i.e.*, truth not as something static, but as active, efficacious reality, the reality of God in covenant-relationship . . . There is no doubt that

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Hausleiter, "Der Glaube Jesu Christi und der christliche Glaube: Ein Beitrag zur Erklärung des Römerbriefes", *NKZ* 2 (1891): 132–4.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ bei Paulus", *TSK* 79 (1906): 420–3.

<sup>6</sup> Markus Barth, "The Kerygma of Galatians", *Int* 21 (1967): 131–46 (134–7); Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 224, n.85.

again and again where we have the words *pistis* and *dikaiosune* in the New Testament we must see behind them the Hebrew words, *'emeth* and *'emunah*, and where in the New Testament we have *aletheia* we must understand that not simply as a Greek word, but in the light of the Biblical inclusion of *pistis* and *dikaiosune* in the concept of truth.<sup>7</sup>

Barr chides Hebert and Torrance:

The whole argument here presupposes that the sense of words is determined predominantly by their metaphysical or theological usages ... What is lacking from this discussion is any idea of a word as a semantic marker, indicating an essential difference from another word and having the ability to mark that differentia in any one of a number of contexts; not becoming intrinsically infected by any particular one of these contexts, and having its sense as a marker sustained and determined not by metaphysical or theological usage but by a general social milieu, in which the language has its life.<sup>8</sup>

Barr follows this with examples from both Greek and Jewish writers to show that “neither Greek metaphysics nor Hebrew conceptions of the reality of God are built into the intrinsic semantic function of the word ἀλήθεια”.<sup>9</sup> For Hebert and Torrance, their “whole theology becomes the characteristic semantic marker-function of the word ‘truth’”.<sup>10</sup> Barr single-handedly turned the argument from one faulty path, but this did not stop the debate. Nor should it have. But after Barr few scholars tried to tie Paul’s Greek to the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

### *Πίστις from the Greek*

Unfortunately, understanding the illegitimacy of importing Hebrew meanings into Greek words did not prevent importing the meanings of other Greek words into πίστις. Many have followed Kittel in his attempt to bring faith to encompass obedience in the phrase “obedience

<sup>7</sup> T.F. Torrance, “One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith”, *ExpTim* 68 (1957): 112.

<sup>8</sup> James Barr, “Faith and Truth: An Examination of Some Linguistic Arguments”, in *Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 161–205 (188).

<sup>9</sup> Barr, “Faith and Truth”, 190.

<sup>10</sup> Barr, “Faith and Truth”, 191.

of faith" in Romans 1:5.<sup>11</sup> This would allow the obedience of Christ in Romans 5 to be read back into πίστις Χριστοῦ in chapter 3. Still others have tried nearly to equate πίστις with righteousness<sup>12</sup> and even with power.<sup>13</sup> What is lacking here, as Barr said of Torrance's work, "is any idea of a word as a semantic marker, indicating an essential difference from another word".<sup>14</sup>

Other scholars look among legitimate meanings of πίστις to try to understand πίστις Χριστοῦ, the most common choices being "faith" and "faithfulness". But some scholars suggest other definitions. In 1966 Greer Taylor proposed that πίστις in Galatians 3:22 referred to the *fidei commissum* of Roman law. The *fidei commissum* allowed a testator of a will to appoint successive heirs, even as the Abrahamic covenant appointed Abraham and then his seed, Christ.<sup>15</sup>

More than twenty years later, David Hay suggested πίστις be translated "pledge" or "evidence" – a meaning he found common in Philo and Josephus. He argued that in Galatians 3:23, 25 πίστις means "the objective ground of faith" – that is, Jesus – and that this explains why Paul speaks of faith as "coming".<sup>16</sup> Hay's view, like Taylor's, has not received wide acceptance. If "*fidei commissum*" or "pledge/evidence" were legitimate possibilities in Galatians 3, it would not help the reader understand πίστις Χριστοῦ in Romans because in Romans the ideas of two successive heirs and of faith as coming do not appear.

### *Faith or Faithfulness?*

Up to this point in the discussion, most scholars have tacitly assumed that πίστις Χριστοῦ has the same meaning in each epistle and they define

<sup>11</sup> Kittel, "Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ", 423. Others include Markus Barth, "The Faith of the Messiah", *HeyJ* 10 (1969): 366; Richard B. Hays, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology: What Is at Stake?", in *Pauline Theology. IV. Looking Back, Pressing On* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997; first published in *SBLSP* 30 [1991]: 714–29), 35–60 (40); J. Louis Martyn in *Galatians*, 276; and Sam K. Williams, *Galatians* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 66.

<sup>12</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough and A. T. Kraabel, "Paul and the Hellenization of Christianity", in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1968; repr. 1970), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Hung-Sik Choi, "Πίστις in Galatians 5:5–6: Neglected Evidence for the Faithfulness of Christ", *JBL* 124 (2005): 467–90 (482–3).

<sup>14</sup> Barr, "Faith and Truth", 188.

<sup>15</sup> Greer M. Taylor, "Function of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians", *JBL* 85 (1966): 58–76.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Hay, "Pistis as 'Ground for Faith' in Hellenized Judaism and Paul", *JBL* 108 (1989): 461–76 (463, 471).

πίστις by “faith” or “faithfulness”. Some scholars argue that πίστις must have both meanings whenever it appears. D.H. van Daalen, for example, concludes that because the Greeks used a single word to mean both “faith” and “faithfulness” they did not distinguish between them.<sup>17</sup> Hays labels it a “semantic fallacy” therefore if we make this distinction.<sup>18</sup> By this argument, however, πίστις would also have to include the meanings “pledge”, “evidence”, and “*fidei commissum*”, which would make nearly every occurrence of πίστις (not to mention πίστις Χριστοῦ) unintelligible. Moisés Silva points out that intentional ambiguity in a text is rare and that context will usually eliminate multiple meanings.<sup>19</sup>

In trying to decide between the meanings “faith” and “faithfulness”, Donald Robinson notes that πίστις probably never means faith in the Septuagint.<sup>20</sup> George Howard looks outside the biblical text to find that πίστις means faithfulness more often than it means trust in Jewish Hellenistic Greek.<sup>21</sup> Although these observations are among the most often cited arguments for πίστις meaning faithfulness, they say little other than that the Old Testament and Jewish Hellenistic Greek literature speak more about the concept of faithfulness than they do of faith.

Context helps more in correctly defining the particular use of a term than general statistics. Along these lines, Moule argues that the use of the verb πιστεύω determines the meaning of the noun πίστις in Galatians 2:16 where both words appear.<sup>22</sup> Advocates of the subjective genitive challenge this argument. Douglas Campbell labels it a fallacy to derive the meaning of πίστις from its cognate verb πιστεύω.<sup>23</sup> Barry Matlock counters, however, that Paul himself substitutes the noun πίστις for the verb πιστεύω when he quotes Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:9. This is important in determining the meaning of πίστις because πιστεύω has a narrower semantic range, one which does not include “be faithful”.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> D.H. van Daalen, “‘Faith’ according to Paul”, *ExpTim* 87 (1975): 83–5 (84).

<sup>18</sup> Hays, “What Is at Stake?”, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 149–56. For a test for ambiguity, see R. Barry Matlock, “Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective”, *NovT* 42 (2000): 4.

<sup>20</sup> Donald W.B. Robinson, “‘The Faith of Jesus Christ’: A New Testament Debate”, *RTR* 29 (1970): 76.

<sup>21</sup> George E. Howard, “Romans 3:21–31 and the Inclusion of the Gentiles”, *HTR* 63 (1970): 230.

<sup>22</sup> C.F.D. Moule, “The Biblical Conception of ‘Faith’”, *ExpTim* 68 (1957): 222.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, “False Presuppositions in the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: A Response to Brian Dodd”, *JBL* 116 (1997): 715–16.

<sup>24</sup> Matlock, “Detheologizing ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ”, 13, 15.

For the objective genitive view, faith is the only possible meaning of πίστις in πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases but, for the subjective genitive, either “faith” or “faithfulness” would make the phrase intelligible. Proponents of the subjective genitive have been vague about the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ through much of the discussion. But scholars are working to define the term more precisely, and at this time “faith of Christ” and “faithfulness of Christ” each has its backers. In the nineteenth century, J.P. Lange stood with “the faithfulness of Christ” because “[a]s to his knowledge, Christ of course did not walk by faith but by sight”.<sup>25</sup> Hung-Sik Choi and Ardel Caneday take the same stand today but on the grounds that Christ having faith is not a prominent theme in Paul.<sup>26</sup> Advocates of this view often define the faithfulness of Christ specifically as his death for humankind.<sup>27</sup>

“Faith of Christ” has early origins in the debate as well. Kittel wrote that Paul used the name “Jesus” in Romans 3:26 to make it clear that πίστις Χριστοῦ is the faith Jesus had in the days of his flesh.<sup>28</sup> Erwin Goodenough says that Romans 4 compares Christ’s faith with Abraham’s and that 4:22 assumes that Christ believed in his own resurrection: this is the faith of Christ that brings righteousness.<sup>29</sup> Scholars also turn to the gospels to find examples of Jesus’ faith. For example, Paul Pollard, along with others, reasons that since the disciples failed to heal the boy with the demon in Mark 9:14–29 because of their lack of faith, Jesus’ success must have been due to his faith. Furthermore, when Jesus cursed the fig tree in Mark 11:12–14, 20–25, his words “have faith in God” imply that he dried up the fig tree by faith and that similar faith can move mountains. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane was a prayer of faith, and even Jesus’ enemies said he trusted (πείθω) in God.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Johann P. Lange, *Romans* (trans. Philip Schaff; n.p., 1865; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, ca. 1950), 129.

<sup>26</sup> Ardel B. Caneday, “Galatians 3:22ff.: A *Crux Interpretum* for ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ in Paul’s Thought”, (conference paper, Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, 16–18 November 1995), 10; Choi, “Πίστις in Galatians 5:5–6”, 471.

<sup>27</sup> Hays, “What Is at Stake?”, 48; Morna D. Hooker, “Πίστις Χριστοῦ”, in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; first published in *NTS* 35 [1989]: 321–42), 174; Luke Timothy Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus”, *CBQ* 44 (1982): 80.

<sup>28</sup> Kittel, “Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”, 426.

<sup>29</sup> Goodenough and Kraabel, “Paul and the Hellenization of Christianity”, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Jesse Paul Pollard, “The Problem of the Faith of Christ” (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 1982), 64, 71, 77, 80.

Advocates of the objective genitive argue against both views. Dunn maintains that the meaning “‘the faithfulness of Christ’ would require a good deal of unpacking, which Paul never provides”.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in Romans 4 Paul attacks the Jewish tradition that Abraham was “the archetype of *faithfulness*”. Abraham’s πίστις meant his faith in God’s promises (4:16–22), not his faithfulness. Proponents of the subjective genitive, therefore, who demand that the structurally similar phrases πίστις Χριστοῦ in Romans 3:26 and πίστις Ἀβραάμ in 4:16 correspond in meaning cannot take πίστις Χριστοῦ as “the faithfulness of Christ”.<sup>32</sup> To give up the link between 3:26 and 4:16, however, is to give up one of the strongest arguments for the subjective genitive. But to turn to the “faith of Christ” view is difficult to sustain even in the gospels, much less in Paul. These problems may not finally defeat the subjective genitive, but they do suggest that the battle must be fought with more than a lexical sword.

## Grammatical Arguments

Arland Hultgren hypothesizes that whenever Paul uses πίστις followed by a subjective genitive, the article is “invariably present” before πίστις. Since πίστις is anarthrous in all πίστις Χριστοῦ formulations, except that in Ephesians 3:12 (which he does not consider Pauline), Hultgren concludes that the genitive in πίστις Χριστοῦ cannot be subjective.<sup>33</sup> Hultgren’s theory does not tell the reader whether or not the genitive is subjective if the article is present. It simply says that if the article is absent, then the genitive is not subjective. Therefore, to test Hultgren’s theory, we must consider Paul’s anarthrous uses of πίστις followed by a genitive. Any subjective uses of the genitive disprove the theory. Aside from the πίστις Χριστοῦ formulations, anarthrous πίστις is rarely followed by a genitive in Paul. However, πίστις Ἀβραάμ in Romans 4:16 hammers the nail into the coffin of Hultgren’s grammatical rule. Paul did not consider the article necessary before πίστις followed by Ἀβραάμ as a subjective genitive.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 138–9.

<sup>32</sup> James D.G. Dunn, “Once More ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ”, in Hay and Johnson, eds., *Looking Back, Pressing On*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, “The Pistis Christou Formulation in Paul”, *NovT* 22 (1980): 253–8.

<sup>34</sup> Contra Dunn, “Once More”, 66.

Unfortunately, to verify his theory, Hultgren primarily examines articular uses of πίστις followed by a genitive.<sup>35</sup> When he does deal with Romans 4:16, he does not adequately substantiate why he finds it clear that the genitive is not subjective.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Sam Williams, in trying to refute Hultgren, considers Romans 3:3 and 4:12, passages where the nouns are articular rather than anarthrous.<sup>37</sup> This instance of confusion in the debate shows more than a momentary slip in the thinking of Hultgren and Williams. Scholars on both sides of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate cite Williams' argument as decisively disproving Hultgren's hypothesis.

As for the subjective genitive, George Howard led the way down the grammatical/syntactical path. He notes that Paul uses πίστις plus a genitive of person or personal pronoun twenty-four times outside the πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases, and each refers to the faith of that person.<sup>38</sup> He states further that "it was inappropriate to the Hellenistic Jewish mentality to express the object of faith by means of the objective genitive ... it does not occur".<sup>39</sup> He also cites Bible versions, such as the Peshitta and the Latin Vulgate, which translate πίστις Χριστοῦ with a phrase equivalent to "faith of Christ" and concludes that Luther appears to be the first to use πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike Hultgren, Howard has been widely followed by proponents of his view. And as far as I have found, his syntactical claims went unchallenged until Harrisville and Matlock took them on. Harrisville, as mentioned earlier, found the early church fathers (so much as their writings speak on the issue) uniformly to have understood πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive.<sup>41</sup> He later found that well-known Greek writers and orators expressed an object for πίστις using both objective and subjective genitives.<sup>42</sup>

Matlock replies to Howard that "unless 'God' or 'Christ' is the 'object' in question, the possibility of the objective genitive typically does not

<sup>35</sup> Hultgren, "Pistis Christou Formulation", 253–8. In fact, each instance of πίστις he lists on p. 253 is articular.

<sup>36</sup> Hultgren, "Pistis Christou Formulation", 256–7.

<sup>37</sup> Sam K. Williams, "Again Pistis Christou", *CBQ* 49 (1987): 432–3.

<sup>38</sup> George E. Howard, "Notes and Observations on the 'Faith of Christ'," *HTR* 60 (1967): 459.

<sup>39</sup> George E. Howard, "Faith of Christ", in *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2.758.

<sup>40</sup> Howard, "Notes and Observations", 460–1.

<sup>41</sup> Harrisville, "Witness of the Fathers."

<sup>42</sup> Roy A. Harrisville, "Before ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: The Objective Genitive as Good Greek", *NovT* 48 (2006): 353–8.

even arise".<sup>43</sup> It is context and not the meaning with the highest count in the literature that must determine the sense of any use of πίστις.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, translations resembling "faith of Christ" in the Latin Vulgate and Syriac Peshitta cannot be used to determine the translators' understanding because they used a "translation-by-default" and passed on the ambiguity they inherited from Paul without making an exegetical decision.<sup>45</sup>

The main arguments of Hultgren and Howard have been effectively disproven, but grammatical and syntactical arguments still help shape the debate. The most common charge against the objective genitive, for example, is that it creates a redundancy in Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; 3:22; and Philippians 3:9.<sup>46</sup> Moule gave the first defense of the redundancy in Galatians 2:16 when he said that the verb πιστεύω determines the meaning of the noun πίστις in the same verse.<sup>47</sup> Regarding Romans 3:22, Dunn states that Paul repeats himself to emphasize "all".<sup>48</sup> Dunn also writes that Paul's Greek in Philippians 3:9 "would scarcely be intelligible" if he meant the first occurrence of πίστις to refer to Christ's faith and the second to human faith.<sup>49</sup> And because the second reference to faith modifies the first, there is a redundancy whether the genitive is subjective or objective.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the twofold occurrence of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians 2:16 and the threefold occurrence of δικαιοῦν and ἐξ ἔργων νόμου in the same verse show well enough that Paul did not share our aversion to repetition.

Other aspects of Paul's style, such as his use of prepositions, also play a role in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. Williams, for example, concludes that Paul never uses πίστις ἐν Χριστῷ "faith in Christ" because for Paul the object of our faith is God, not Christ.<sup>51</sup> However, Veronica Koperski

<sup>43</sup> R. Barry Matlock, "'Even the Demons Believe': Paul and πίστις Χριστοῦ", *CBQ* 64 (2002): 304.

<sup>44</sup> Matlock, "Detheologizing ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ", 5.

<sup>45</sup> Matlock, "Even the Demons Believe", 306.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Markus Barth, "Jews and Gentiles: The Social Character of Justification in Paul", *JES* 5 (1968): 241–67 (247); Hays, "What Is at Stake?", 46; R. Longenecker, "The Obedience of Christ", 147, n.1; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 249, n.114; Tonstad, "Reading Paul in a New Paradigm", 54, n.71.

<sup>47</sup> Moule, "Biblical Conception of 'Faith'", 222.

<sup>48</sup> Dunn, "Once More", 75.

<sup>49</sup> Dunn, "Once More", 79.

<sup>50</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, "Apropos the Faith of/in Christ: A Response to Hays and Dunn", in Hay and Johnson, eds., *Looking Back, Pressing On*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 70.

observes that Paul does not use ἐν after πίστις to denote faith in God either.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Hultgren concludes that where another writer might use πίστις plus a preposition to say “faith in Christ”, Paul uses πίστις Χριστοῦ.<sup>53</sup> However, this assumes that Paul ever wanted to say “faith in Christ”. Campbell challenges Hultgren’s conclusion, contending that Hultgren bases it on too slim a list of works he considers Pauline.<sup>54</sup> (The same observation could apply to Williams.) Preston Sprinkle, depending upon a larger Pauline corpus, sees Ephesians 1:15 as a point against an objective genitive because Paul’s use of πίστις ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ shows that he had an unambiguous phrase with which to say “faith in”.<sup>55</sup> However, Paul did not shrink from using more than one expression to state an idea. He uses, for example, two different prepositions in the phrases ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ in Romans 1:10 and διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ in Romans 15:32, when he says that “by the will of God” he wishes to visit the Roman believers.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, to say that Paul said “faith in Christ” with ἐν does not mean he would not say it without. In short, Paul’s style has been used to back various claims but ultimately cannot deliver on them.

Scholars also turn to grammatical parallels to decipher πίστις Χριστοῦ. Kittel, for example, observes that ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ in Romans 3:26 and ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ in Romans 4:16 are identical except for the person named. Romans 4:16 clearly speaks of the faith Abraham had. Kittel concludes, therefore, that Romans 3:26 speaks of the faith Christ had.<sup>57</sup> Kittel has many followers. Hays, in fact, calls this a “fatal embarrassment” for the objective genitive position, and Howard says that Paul would be “hopelessly confusing his readers” if he intended Romans 3:22, 26 as objective genitives but Romans 3:3 and 4:16 as subjective.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Hans Lietzmann finds ἡ πίστις τοῦ εὐαγγελίου in Philippians 1:27 to parallel πίστις Χριστοῦ in Romans

<sup>52</sup> Veronica Koperski, “The Meaning of *Pistis Christou* in Philippians 3:9”, *LS* 18 (1993): 202, n.28.

<sup>53</sup> Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou* Formulation”, 253–4.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21–26* (JSNTSup 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 215.

<sup>55</sup> Preston Sprinkle, “‘Two’s Company, Three’s a Crowd?’: Another Option for the ‘*PISTIS CHRISTOU*’ Debate” (conference paper, Far West Region of the Evangelical Theological Society, Sun Valley, CA; 2 May 2003), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. also Paul’s use of διὰ with θέλημα in 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1 with his use of κατά with θέλημα in Gal. 1:4.

<sup>57</sup> Kittel, “Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”, 424.

<sup>58</sup> Hays, “What Is at Stake?”, 47; Howard, “Notes and Observations”, 459.

3:22 and uses this as evidence for πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive.<sup>59</sup> Schreiner uses the objective genitive τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Philippians 3:8 to conclude that πίστις Χριστοῦ in 3:9 is objective.<sup>60</sup> However, from the parallel between πίστις Χριστοῦ and ἔργα νόμου in Galatians 2:16, Kittel concludes that πίστις Χριστοῦ is subjective and Dennis Lindsay that it is attributive.<sup>61</sup> The real problem with the parallels is not difficulty in pinpointing the type of genitive in the parallel expression. It is that the type of genitive in one expression has no bearing on the genitive in another. In Acts 9:31, for example, Luke sets “the fear of the Lord” beside “the comfort of the Holy Spirit”, an objective beside a subjective genitive, which readers clearly understand.<sup>62</sup> Harrisville, in fact, found the early church fathers to understand Romans 4:16 as subjective and Romans 3:26 as objective without confusion or question.<sup>63</sup>

The failure of most grammatical and syntactical arguments to persuade has left a few people in both the subjective and objective camps and a few others in neither. Torrance sees πίστις Χριστοῦ as a “polarized expression”, and Morna Hooker views it as a “concentric expression”.<sup>64</sup> To read πίστις Χριστοῦ as both subjective and objective, however, means that in each occurrence of the phrase we are to read of both Christians and Christ expressing πίστις and to track these parallel meanings through the text as Paul continues his argument. Overloading a phrase with theology overloads the reader’s mind as well.

On the other hand, Hultgren and Williams, although they disagree about who exercises πίστις, agree that the genitive is adjectival in function, rather than purely subjective or objective, and translate the phrase “Christic faith” (Hultgren) or “Christ-faith” (Williams).<sup>65</sup> Caneday argues, however, that the adjectival genitive is “difficult to sustain and more difficult to explain”.<sup>66</sup> He notes that Williams’ view of

<sup>59</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (HNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933), 48.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 213.

<sup>61</sup> Kittel, “Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”, 427; Dennis R. Lindsay, “Works of Law, Hearing of Faith and Πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians 2:16–3:5”, *SCJ* 3 (2000): 87.

<sup>62</sup> Noted by Matlock, “Detheologizing ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ”, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Harrisville, “Witness of the Fathers”, 236–41.

<sup>64</sup> T.F. Torrance, “The Biblical Conception of ‘Faith’,” *ExpTim* 68 (1957): 221; Hooker, “Πίστις Χριστοῦ”, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou* Formulation”, 257; Williams, “Again *Pistis Christou*”, 437.

<sup>66</sup> Caneday, “Galatians 3:22ff.: A *Crux Interpretum*”, 6.

the genitive as adjectival still depends upon the concept of the subjective genitive because the faith belongs to Christ. In this case, therefore, Caneday sees the adjectival and subjective categories as merging.<sup>67</sup> Of course, a similar observation could be made about πίστις Χριστοῦ as an adjectival genitive with believers exercising the faith. The adjectival genitive thus carries some of the objections to the subjective or objective genitive. However, more important objections arise against the adjectival view. What, for example, is “Christic faith”? Williams has in mind a faith “which is given its distinctive character by the absolute trust and unwavering obedience of Jesus”.<sup>68</sup> Hultgren describes it as “faith which is in and of [i.e., from] Christ”.<sup>69</sup> Seifrid says that with πίστις Χριστοῦ as a “qualifying genitive” (i.e., adjectival) Paul expresses “the basis of faith and therewith its character”.<sup>70</sup> Some scholars reject a subjective or objective category because Paul had other, and even clearer, ways to express either idea.<sup>71</sup> But are there not clearer ways (even if wordier) to express the thought of an adjectival genitive? Furthermore, most πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases include the proper name Ἰησοῦς, but proponents of the adjectival genitive have yet to address whether or not the Greek of Paul’s time allowed a proper noun to modify πίστις as an adjectival genitive. And, if it did, what did it mean? The definitions cited here are more theological than lexical and could hardly be inherent in the simple phrase.

Although grammatical arguments continue to be important, scholars on all sides of the issue agree that the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ will not be determined by grammar alone.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, it is theology, not grammar, that continues to drive the debate.

## Theological Arguments

In the 1950s, scholars would state their theological positions. As the debate has progressed, however, they have been more inclined to

<sup>67</sup> Caneday, “Galatians 3:22ff.: A *CruX Interpretum*”, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, “Again *Pistis Christou*”, 446.

<sup>69</sup> Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou* Formulation”, 257.

<sup>70</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 146; Sprinkle, “Two’s Company, Three’s a Crowd?”, 26.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., Caneday, “Galatians 3:22ff.: A *CruX Interpretum*”, 5; Hooker, “Πίστις Χριστοῦ”, 165; Schreiner, *Paul*, 213.

accuse others of theological bias than to state their own theological concerns. Certain concerns which *are* stated serve more to distort other interpretations of πίστις Χριστοῦ than to clarify relevant issues. There is thus a need to define plainly the theological issues related to πίστις Χριστοῦ.

Hebert stated one of the first theological issues in the debate when he noted that if Paul put up “simply a personal attitude of ‘believing’” against the Jewish claim to righteousness in the early chapters of Romans, he would “have a singularly weak case”. Instead Paul sets “the work of God’s Righteousness” in opposition to Jewish claims of justification.<sup>73</sup> Many have followed Hebert. Hays, in fact, adds that πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive “leaves Christ in the passive role of being the object of our justifying faith”.<sup>74</sup> Van Daalen disagrees: “[I]f I say that I have faith in someone, I do not mean that I have some wonderful quality called faith, but simply that he or she is someone who can be relied upon; I am not really saying something about myself at all but about the other person.”<sup>75</sup> With the translation “faith in Christ”, “the emphasis is still on the reliability of the object”.<sup>76</sup> A salvation depending wholly upon God is true for πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective or objective genitive and therefore cannot be used to distinguish between the two interpretations.

Theological differences also extend to views of the context of πίστις Χριστοῦ verses. Proponents of the subjective genitive usually interpret the context of the πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases as universalistic in scope, whereas proponents of the objective genitive normally apply it to the individual. This fits the fact that “faith in Christ” is exercised by the individual believer, and “the faith/fulness of Christ” is not. The categories are not hard and fast, however, as some advocates of the objective genitive also see Paul arguing from a universalistic position.<sup>77</sup> It is pertinent, then, to ask whether or not the scope of Paul’s argument demands a particular view of the genitive. If the thrust of Romans 1–4 or Galatians 2–3 is salvation-historical, must πίστις Χριστοῦ directly name Christ’s deed, or may it speak of an individual’s involvement in a salvation-historical justification?

<sup>73</sup> Gabriel Hebert, “‘Faithfulness’ and ‘Faith’”, *RTR* 14 (1955): 33–40 (38–9).

<sup>74</sup> Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 121.

<sup>75</sup> van Daalen, “Faith”, 84.

<sup>76</sup> van Daalen, “Faith”, 84.

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., Achtemeier, “Apropos the Faith”, 85, 91; Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 168, n.6; Schreiner, *Paul*, 214.

A new view of the Law is often linked to πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive as well. The clear contrast between πίστις Χριστοῦ and ἔργα νόμου in Galatians 3, Romans 3, and Philippians 3 should leave it as no surprise that those who differ on the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ usually differ on Paul's view of the Law. The traditional position is that Paul contrasts two ways of obtaining righteousness: by faith in Christ or by works of Law. Instead of two human responses, however, proponents of the subjective genitive see a contrast between a human activity and an activity of God or Christ. J.L. Martyn says, for example, that when Paul spoke of πίστις Χριστοῦ, he meant "an act of God carried out in Christ".<sup>78</sup> Campbell, also defending the subjective genitive, observes that since World War II:

Pauline scholarship has been reorienting its presentation of late Second Temple Jewish soteriology away from a depiction in terms of crabbed legalism ... This has in turn necessitated a reorientation of Paul ... Paul and Second Temple Judaism now share the principle of individual faith, since it exists at the heart of the covenant relationship. Consequently, it no longer seems necessary for Paul to state, particularly to a Jewish or Jewish-taught audience, that God requires a response of faith ... [T]he more distinctive and contentious idea of Christ's messianic faithfulness may be a more appropriate antithesis to the notion of 'torah-works' when Paul speaks of πίστις.<sup>79</sup>

But surely the contrast between ἔργα νόμου and πίστις Χριστοῦ for the objective view of the genitive is at heart also a work of human beings versus a work of God because "faith in Christ" means a reliance on Christ's work on the cross. The new view of the Law, however, is a true contrast to that of the past, but does the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ depend upon it?

Advocates of the subjective genitive often tie new views of justification and salvation to πίστις Χριστοῦ. Williams, for example, acknowledges that δικαιοσύνη was a forensic term used in the law court. However, he says that the notion of relationship was always implicit in the term because one is righteous by fulfilling the covenant that obtains.<sup>80</sup> Hays explains further that justification does not confer a "legal status" on human beings or consist of a declaration of righteousness ("legal fiction") for

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<sup>78</sup> Martyn, *Galatians*, 270.

<sup>79</sup> Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 61–2.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 63.

them. It is rather a “formal inclusion” of people into the community of the “sons of the living God”.<sup>81</sup> Douglas Moo’s concern is that reading justification by faith as having its “primary focus on the inclusion of the Gentiles” challenges the Reformation doctrine of justification.<sup>82</sup> And Harrisville states that a reduced emphasis on faith causes readers to wonder what connects them to Christ apart from a vague sense of “participationism” in Christ.<sup>83</sup> Hays, however, replies that Romans does not answer the question, “How can I be saved?”<sup>84</sup> And Campbell sees individual appropriation of salvation as a minor theme that seems incongruous with respect to Romans as a whole.<sup>85</sup> Howard writes that the focus of scholarship is turning away from seeing salvation by grace through faith as the solution to the human dilemma under the Law and toward Paul’s concern for admitting Gentiles into the kingdom of God. Interpreting πίστις Χριστοῦ as divine faithfulness fits the new emphasis in Pauline theology because it focuses on the faithfulness of God to Jew and Gentile alike.<sup>86</sup> This difference is genuinely related to the translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ because if πίστις Χριστοῦ does not mean “faith in Christ” there are eight fewer references in Paul to the means of appropriating salvation than was previously supposed. But must one who sees πίστις Χριστοῦ as subjective “no longer equate justification by faith with the basis of Paul’s gospel”?<sup>87</sup>

Twelve years after Hebert reintroduced the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, Markus Barth predicted a change in theological outlook that would break the traditional mould on Paul. Strands of some of the theological issues run through the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. Scholars choose their strands and tie them together in different ways around the phrase. But it has not yet been shown whether most strands are contingent upon a particular interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ. That depends upon exegesis, and it is to exegesis that many scholars look today as they continue the debate.

<sup>81</sup> Richard B. Hays, “Justification”, in *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1131.

<sup>82</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 243.

<sup>83</sup> Harrisville, “Before ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ”, 357.

<sup>84</sup> Richard B. Hays, “Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3”, *JBL* 99 (1980): 107–15 (112).

<sup>85</sup> Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 206.

<sup>86</sup> Howard, “Notes and Observations”, 464–5.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Plevnik believes this to be the viewpoint of most scholars today. Joseph Plevnik, “The Understanding of God at the Basis of Pauline Theology”, *CBQ* 65 (2003): 567.

## Conclusion

Because the faithfulness of Christ implies that people can have faith in him and because an injunction to have faith in him assumes that he is faithful, both the faithfulness of Christ and faith in Christ are ideas that fit the context of each passage that uses πίστις Χριστοῦ. This is the primary cause for difficulty in making a strong case for one view against the other. Forgetting this has led to some unfounded concerns, as mentioned previously. It is necessary, however, with many issues, to determine exactly what will stand or fall with a particular view of πίστις Χριστοῦ. Will justification by faith in Christ stand if the genitive is subjective? Will the New Perspective on Paul fall if the genitive is objective? What becomes of participation in Christ? Must different readings of πίστις Χριστοῦ lead to different pictures of the theology of Romans or Galatians? Does the subjective genitive mean that faith is simply the response of those already justified? Does the objective genitive mean that God's act in Christ is simply a response to human faith? Must we confuse means and grounds or hold that faith is another term for obedience? What must we actually conclude if πίστις Χριστοῦ is objective, subjective, adjectival?

Good lexical, grammatical, and syntactical arguments, although necessary to keep the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate on track, have proven inadequate by themselves to answer these questions. Sound exegesis is needed, and scholars are turning to the text. This, too, however, has multiplied the questions: how is πίστις Χριστοῦ related to ὁ δίκαιος in Romans 1:17, to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Romans 1:17 and 3:21, to ὑπακοή in Romans 1:5, to ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Romans 1:17, to ἔργα νόμου in Galatians 2:16? How does τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην in Philippians 3:9 relate to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Romans 3:21, 22? Is Abraham's faith in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 a picture of Christ's faith, the believer's faith, or both?

Concern for exegesis has, unfortunately, also multiplied assumptions, and the assumptions are not always shared even by those on the same side of an issue. Some scholars, for example, redefine "faith", "justification", or "righteousness", ideas clearly related to πίστις Χριστοῦ.<sup>88</sup> Without solid support for changes in definitions, however, the debate will come full circle to the lexical problems of Hebert and Torrance.

<sup>88</sup> E.g., Martyn, *Galatians*, 272–3; N.T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 110–22.

Barth's prediction has proven true, but perhaps even Barth would have been surprised at the number of ways Paul has been rewritten. The twentieth century has made progress by asking some questions and by disproving some answers. It is for the twenty-first century to provide careful exegesis; to shore up its arguments; to support or discard its assumptions; to determine the implications of a subjective, objective, or adjectival genitive in πίστις Χριστοῦ; and to place the debate on a sound footing. And so let the debate continue.