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Faith: An Activity of Christ or of the Believer? A Contribution to the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate

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1. Introduction

The term *πίστις χριστοῦ* is commonly used as to designate *πίστις* related in one way or another to Jesus, with an ambiguous genitive relationship. This type of phrase appears, in one form or another, six times in the undisputed Paulines. The passages from the undisputed Paulines are Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16 (twice); 3:22; and Phil 3:9.¹ We shall treat these instances, but also consider more briefly other pertinent NT passages, including Eph 3:12, Mk 11:22 and Jas 2:1. We shall analyse this phrase from various standpoints. First we shall look at the grammar to determine whether the phrase is a subjective or objective genitive. After dealing with the grammar *per se*, we shall make an exegesis of each of the passages separately. Finally, we shall analyse our results in order to discern a concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*.

2. Grammatical Considerations

Lexical and Semantic Considerations on πίστις

Much of the present discussion on whether the word group *πίστις χριστοῦ* is subjective or objective genitive relates to a desire to more clearly define the meaning of the head term *πίστις*. Most commonly, those who favour an objective interpretation prefer translating it as “faith,” and those fa-

¹ Lührmann 1992, 758. However, Gal 3:26 also contains the phrase in P⁴⁶. But since this reading is not widely accepted, we shall not deal with this possible occurrence in this article. Ulrichs (2007, 71–92) argues that 1 Thess 1:3 also should be considered an occurrence of the *πίστις χριστοῦ*, but I do not consider this to be evident from the passage itself, it rather has to be read in from the other *πίστις χριστοῦ*-instances.

vouring a subjective interpretation prefer translating it “faithfulness.” In this way, the case is often used to determine the *meaning* of the word *πίστις*, somehow claiming that its meaning changes depending on what type of genitive it is. It is, however, very hard to substantiate linguistically that the meaning of a word would change only depending on the case in which it stands.² The context is the most pivotal aspect in determining the meaning of a word – the case alone does not offer conclusive evidence.

Some have argued that *πίστις* in the time of Paul had the basic meaning of “faithfulness,” on the basis of Josephus using the word in this way.³ Torrance argues not only that *πίστις* has mainly to do with faithfulness, but also that faith is really nothing else than a response to divine faithfulness.⁴ Thus, he claims that *πίστις* has two dimensions: God’s faithfulness, and the human response to God’s faithfulness.⁵ Moule, however, labels Torrance’s view of *πίστις* as faithfulness as a “false trail.”⁶ He argues that it is not sound to view faithfulness as the main ingredient of *πίστις* *χριστοῦ*. He admits that Jesus’ own faith/faithfulness is sometimes alluded to (cf Heb 12:8), but claims that *πίστις* in general is not mainly used in this way. This is also supported by Ljungman, who notes that *πίστις* is actually only used about God in two or three passages in the LXX.⁷ Torrance’s main argument for relating *πίστις* to faithfulness is grounded in the theory of van Unnik, that *πίστις* reflects the Hebrew אמוּנָה, meaning faithfulness.⁸ However, this connection has been severely questioned by James Barr.⁹ Barr not only criticised the equation of אמוּנָה with *πίστις*, but also

² Porter and Pitts 2009, 36. This is of course not true for prepositions (cf. Blomqvist and Jastrup 1991, 197), but for verbs and nouns, which is what is discussed here.

³ McRay 2003, 356.

⁴ Torrance 1957, 111.

⁵ Wallis (1995, 124–127) also draws the conclusion that faith is the response to divine faithfulness. Although Wallis presents good evidence for faith being a response to divine faithfulness, this does not prove a subjective interpretation. Rather the response-aspect would point it toward being an objective genitive, however with much of the focus of those clinging to a subjective interpretation attached to it.

⁶ Moule 1956, 157.

⁷ Ljungman 1964, 13–14, speaking of Lam 3:23 and Hab 2:4, of which Hab 2:4 shall be dealt with later in this article. However, as Otto notes, although it is mainly used about humans, it is sometimes also used about God, and therefore this possibility must not be ruled out. Both possibilities must be considered in this discussion (Otto 1986, 595).

⁸ van Unnik 1953, 215–234.

⁹ Barr 1961, 161–205. Barr has two main arguments against this: 1) The conception that the “proper” meaning of the Hebrew root אָמַן is only with reference to God is both wrong in itself and supported by an illegitimate confusion of theological and linguistic methods. He stresses that theological concepts and systems should not rule out the basic linguistic rules, but rather interact with them. 2) Designating firmness/ steadfastness/ faithfulness as

claimed that אמונה does not and never did mean “faithfulness,” but rather “trust, belief.”¹⁰ Thus Barr not only questions the method used for equating אמונה with πίστις, but also concludes that even *if* they were directly corresponding to each other, the main meaning of the word would be faith rather than faithfulness.

It must also be noted that Philo uses πίστις rather differently than Josephus, giving it the basic meaning of “trust,” and such trust that is specifically directed toward God.¹¹ Hay has surveyed the use of πίστις in Josephus and Philo and found it to have a wide range of meanings.¹² Thus we may conclude that starting from the lexical meaning of the word, even when looking at contemporary writers, is not a good point of departure. We must not forget the important distinction between *langue* and *parole* made by de Saussure: a word may have several possible meanings in the lexicon, but when a word is put in context it is given only one specific meaning.¹³ The word πίστις has a wide range of meanings, and we cannot presume that there was one unified idea of πίστις in NT times. Thus, the meaning of the word must in each individual case be determined from the context in which it is used.

Porter and Pitts suggest a device that may be helpful in understanding how πίστις should be translated.¹⁴ They suggest that one can study the NT use of πίστις by dividing it into three categories: (1) instances with the article; (2) instances without the article; and (3) πίστις as a relator. When

the fundamental meaning of אמונה is “linguistic nonsense.” He argues that the word is often used with a human subject, but God as subject is only found in obscure places such as Job 15:15, which states “God does not trust in his holy ones” The most common meaning in the OT is faith directed from a person, toward God.

¹⁰ Ibid., 175.

¹¹ Bultmann 1964, 202.

¹² Hay 1989, 463.

¹³ Culler 1986, 33–44.

¹⁴ Porter and Pitts 2009, 29–51. *Category 1* is given three subcategories: a) possessive meaning with a pronoun “your faith” (Matt 9:29; Rom 1:12; 1 Thess 3:2; Heb 11:39; 2 Pet 1:5); (b) doctrinal meaning “the faith” (Acts 13:8; 24:24; 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 3:23; 1 Tim 1:19; 6:10, 21; Tit 1:13); and (c) an abstract meaning with (Acts 3:16; Eph 3:17; Col 2:12) or without (Rom 3:30, 31; Gal 3:14, 26) specifying the designation for the faith. *Category 2* is given two subcategories: (a) with (1 Tim 3:13; 2 Tim 3:15) and without (e.g. Rom 1:17 [3x]; 3:30; 4:16; 5:1; 9:32; 14:23 [2x]; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 3:8, 11, 12, 24; 5:5; Eph 2:8; 6:23; 1 Tim 1:14; 2:7, 15; 4:12; 2 Tim 1:13; Tit 3:15; Heb 6:12; 10:38; 11:6, 13, 33; Jas 1:6; 2:24; 1 Pet 1:5) specifying the designation for the faith. *Category 3*, cf. Phil 3:9 (2x); 2 Tim 3:8; Acts 26:18; Rom 3:25, 26; 4:12; 9:30; 10:6; Gal 3:7, 9; 1 Tim 1:2, 4; Tit 1:1, 4; Heb 11:7; Jas 2:5.

looking at all 55 word groups with *πίστις* as head term (excluding the debated instances), we find that 22 have an article modifying the head term, and 33 do not. The conclusion of this study is that the basic meaning of *πίστις* in NT Greek is “faith” in all three categories. At the same time we must remember that *πίστις* still does not have the meaning of “faith” in *all* instances, and thus we cannot conclude that the passages containing *πίστις χριστοῦ* automatically should have this translation. We see something of the complexity of the question when Longenecker argues that in Gal 5:22, *πίστις* “clearly, without a doubt,” should be translated as “faithfulness,” since it is, in his opinion, put into the same ethical category as gentleness and self-control.¹⁵ However, it is not evident that Paul puts these three in a certain “ethical” category, rather he simply lists fruits of the Spirit. Considering 1 Cor 12:9, where Paul lists *πίστις* as a gift given by the Spirit, this seems rather probable. On the other hand, 1 Cor 12:9, has been also understood as speaking of faithfulness, by arguing that the gift of faith is more than the initial faith of the believer, and rather something which helps the believer endure hardships.¹⁶ Thus, we can conclude that the clear distinction between faith and faithfulness is not entirely easy to make.

The Problem of Subjective and Objective Genitive

Although the *πίστις χριστοῦ* debate is very much concerned with grammar, we must not forget that what is at stake is more than the question of simply a subjective or objective genitive. The debate is not mainly concerning a grammatical relationship in the genitive case but concerning a certain word group relationship.¹⁷ Relating it to a subjective or objective genitive is really an oversimplification. The issue is rather in which realm *πίστις* is to be exercised (and/or initiated): by Christ or by believers.¹⁸ But since the consequences of determining this word group relationship will include interpreting *πίστις χριστοῦ* as either a subjective or objective genitive, we must also address this issue in Paul. It is important to stress that there is a danger in forcing *πίστις χριστοῦ* into being either a subjective or objective genitive. These grammatical categories are merely attempts to explain the grammatical relationships in Greek, and are by no means comprehen-

¹⁵ Longenecker 2002, 262.

¹⁶ Mare 1976, 262.

¹⁷ Porter and Pitts 2009, 47.

¹⁸ Matlock 2007, 174.

sive.¹⁹ It is, in fact, possible that Paul is using the genitive in a way that does not fit our traditional grammatical definitions.²⁰ Investigating the possibility of a different grammatical category is beyond the scope of this article, and thus I shall stick to the categories of subjective and objective genitive, although I am aware that these categories are not comprehensive.

Howard's Study

George Howard's study "Notes and Observations on the Faith of Christ" has been very influential in the *πίστις χριστοῦ* debate.²¹ It is the main source of information for many books and articles dealing with *πίστις χριστοῦ*, including Richard Hays's influential dissertation. Howard has studied *πίστις* followed by the genitive of a person or of a personal pronoun, and concluded that this construction is always to be interpreted subjectively. Although these results seem to be widely accepted, Howard barely presents any arguments at all for this standpoint. Considering that Howard's results are rather the opposite of Pitts and Porter, who have a clear argumentation for their view, one must be cautious of accepting Howard's results too easily. Howard's results are hard to verify, since he does not indicate which passages he has studied. The few references he has provided are also rather ambiguous, as we shall see later in this article.²² Yet, much of the scholarly debate on *πίστις χριστοῦ* is based on Howard's results. This means that much of the modern research on *πίστις χριστοῦ* builds on a foundation that is not entirely solid.

Early Interpretations of Πίστις Χριστοῦ

Many have turned to ancient translations in order to find the understanding of the *πίστις χριστοῦ* in the early church. In the ancient Syriac Peshitta version, Gal 2:16 reads: "Therefore we know that man is not justified

¹⁹ Schmitz 1924, 91–134.

²⁰ The early German school made some attempts to new categories: Haußleiter's *genitivus auctoris* (faith effected by Christ); Deissmann's *genitivus mysticus* (faith experienced in mystical communion with Christ); E. Wißmann's *genitivus confessionis* (confessing faith, acceptance of the Christian message); and O. Schmitz's "characterizing genitive" (Christ-faith). (Dunn 1991, 730). For a further discussion on the problems involved with limiting the discussion to subjective and objective genitive and the other options available, cf Ulrichs 2007, 11–22.

²¹ Howard 1967, 459–484.

²² The faith(fulness) of God in Rom 3:3; the faith of Abraham (4:12, 16); and faith reckoned unto righteousness (Rom 4:5). *Ibid.*, 459.

from the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus the Messiah. And we believe in him, in Jesus the Messiah, that from *his faith, that of the Messiah*, we might be justified, and not from the works of the law,” and Eph 3:12 “In him we have the boldness and access in the confidence *of his faith*.”²³ This could point toward the ancient church interpreting *πίστις χριστοῦ* subjectively in these passages. However, it could also simply reflect a very literal and “wooden” translation of these passages. The Latin Vulgate translates the expression “*fides Iesu Christi*,” which has been used as an argument for Jerome translating it subjectively. However, in Latin, just like in Greek, the genitive may be interpreted either subjectively or objectively.²⁴ Thus, this is not a good argument for either solution. When one takes a look at the church fathers, one realizes that there are indications that Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Clement held an objective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*.²⁵ However, it has also been argued that Origen leaves a door open for a subjective interpretation, thus showing that he was aware of the possibility.²⁶ Thus, when weighing together early translations and church fathers, evidence is not conclusive for the view of *πίστις χριστοῦ* in the early church, although the patristic material pointing toward an objective interpretation must be regarded as being of greater weight than the early translations pointing toward a subjective interpretation.

Some scholars have tried to use different historical bible translations as evidence for or against a certain view. However, this approach is less than useful in establishing a solution to the problem of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. As Fitzmyer notes, early translations do not present good evidence and should thus be avoided.²⁷ The ancient translators probably were just as confused on the issue as we are today, only they may not have been as aware of the problems involved. On the other hand, Church Fathers, medieval theologians, and reformers clearly interpreted *πίστις χριστοῦ* objectively, which could be viewed as supportive of this being the proper interpretation,

²³ Howard 1967, 460. It is problematic that the information available concerning the ancient translations is provided by Howard, since we already earlier noted that other results in the same article are highly questionable. Since Howard argues for a subjective interpretation, it is also less convincing when he claims the ancient translations put it that way. A less biased translation and study of the ancient versions would be to prefer, but has not been available to me in this study.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 461.

²⁵ Elliott 2009, 278.

²⁶ Bird and Whittington 2009, 556.

²⁷ Fitzmyer 1993, 346.

handed down through the tradition of the church. However, thorough exegesis is probably the only way to settle what interpretation Paul originally meant.

Concluding Comment on the Grammatical Discussion

In concluding the section on Grammar, we must first of all admit that no evident solution of the *πίστις χριστοῦ* problem has been reached so far. On the other hand we have seen something of the complexity of the question develop: looking at the meaning of *πίστις* several arguments have been posed for translating “faith” or “faithfulness.” Then again, it may be appropriate to question how relevant translating *πίστις* as faith/faithfulness really is. The distinction between them is not made in the Greek and therefore clinging too much to a distinction between these meanings may distort our understanding of *πίστις*. It is of course not impossible that *πίστις* is a polyseme, but to my mind faith and faithfulness are still close enough in meaning to be treated together. We cannot draw a general conclusion about the meaning of *πίστις* in these instances, nor discern whether *πίστις χριστοῦ* deals with a subjective or objective genitive. In fact, it may well be that it varies from case to case. Therefore, we must turn to exegetical devices to address this question.

3. Exegetical Considerations

Since each instance of *πίστις χριστοῦ* is placed in a *context* where Paul argues for certain things, looking at *πίστις χριστοῦ* in its immediate literary and theological context contributes to our understanding of the expression. In this section we shall deal mainly with exegesis of the different passages, using grammar only as one tool among many to understand the text. We must be aware that conclusions that are drawn concerning the genitive in one passage do not necessarily solve all other instances of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. They must all be treated individually. Even so, they are still part of the same Pauline corpus of theology. Therefore, the following section will compare the passages and place them into the larger theological framework of Paul.

Galatians 2:16

εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ **διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**, καὶ ἡμεῖς **εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν**, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν **ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ** καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but **through faith in Jesus Christ** [or **through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**]. And we have come to **believe in Christ Jesus**, so that we might be justified **by faith in Christ** [or **by the faithfulness of Christ**] and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.²⁸

Gal 2:16 is crucial to the debate since *πίστις χριστοῦ* occurs twice in this verse, but with the phrase *εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν* in between. This construction has been used as a starting point for arguing for a subjective position, since it seems that these two supposed subjective phrases would be contrasted against the “objective” one, using the preposition *εἰς*.²⁹ Although the contrasting preposition *εἰς* cannot be seen as bringing us conclusive evidence, it is often argued that it points toward a subjective understanding of *πίστις χριστοῦ* being more likely. At the same time, looking at the context, we see that the *πίστις χριστοῦ* formulation is used about being declared righteous (*δικαιούται/δικαιωθῶμεν*), and in v 17 Paul explains that we are *seeking* the righteousness in Christ (*ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι*), which would imply that even though all these are passive forms of *δικαιῶ*, they still require the believer to seek it actively. This seems to support an objective reading of the passage, since righteousness by faith is to be *sought*, which would connect *πίστις* to the believer rather than to Christ.³⁰ It could also be argued that this aspect rather points to the *εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν* in between the two discussed genitives. The potential problem with an objective interpretation here is that it seems like Paul is saying the same thing three times in a row. Kittel argues for a

²⁸ Biblical citations are from the NRSV.

²⁹ Longenecker 1990, 88.

³⁰ It must be noted, that the initiation of faith is rather complex. Paul makes clear that the Spirit is the one who brings about faith, through preaching (1 Cor 1:17–18, 21, 23; 2:3–16; Rom 10:15–17), but at the same time the Spirit is a gift which is received by faith (Gal 3:2–6). Note that Abraham is used as an example in Galatians. The theology of *πίστις* in Paul as a whole is rather complex and cannot be dealt with in detail here. However, it is clear from Galatians that the Abraham-type of faith, which is also the theme of the *πίστις χριστοῦ*, is something which human beings direct towards God with the result that God gives his Spirit and righteousness.

subjective interpretation “so dass kein Wort zu viel oder zu wenig gesagt ist.”³¹ As Kittel notes, a subjective interpretation might solve this problem. On the other hand, Dunn argues for an objective interpretation partially *on the basis* of this threefold proclamation of faith in Christ, which he views as very fitting in the context. He structures the passage as follows:

...not from works of the law	<i>but only through pistis Christou;</i>
	and we have believed in Christ Jesus
	<i>in order to be justified from pistis Christou</i>
and <i>not</i> by works of the law	
for by works of the law	shall <i>no flesh</i> be justified ³²

Thus, Dunn argues, Paul *intended* to repeat himself, in order to make his point clear beyond doubt, using repetition as an emphatic device.³³ In this way, the text portrays a dichotomy between salvation through works of the law and through faith in Christ.³⁴ Longenecker considers this too simple, and claims that the grammar favours the subjective interpretation.³⁵ However, as we have seen previously, the grammar will not take us all the way in either direction. Dunn is supported by Matlock, who argues that this pattern of ABB/BAA is part of Paul’s rhetorical structure.³⁶ However, one might as well argue for a structure of ABCBA, and thus purely rhetorical arguments will not be sufficient to settle the issue.³⁷ Some scholars have argued for an objective reading on the basis that πίστις does not refer to the πίστις of Christ, but rather to the πίστις that makes human beings righteous.³⁸ This argument is not conclusive however, for even if πίστις is what makes humans righteous, it can still have its *origin* in Christ.³⁹ Thus we may conclude that it is not only hard to argue *for* a certain interpretation, but it is also hard to rule the other one out. Both interpretations make

³¹ Kittel 1906, 430.

³² Dunn 1998, 381.

³³ This view is also supported by Lambrecht 1996, 56.

³⁴ Dunn 1998, 381.

³⁵ Longenecker 1996, 79.

³⁶ Matlock 2007, 198. He admits that this is not, strictly speaking, a chiasm, but argues that the second half of the pattern is inverse of the first.

³⁷ I. e., A is being declared righteous without works of the law, B is πίστις χριστού, and C is the faith in Christ—this would be a clearly chiasitic structure.

³⁸ Gärtner 1998, 76; and Betz 1979, 117.

³⁹ Wallis (1995), arguing for a subjective interpretation, has this as one of his main points, speaking of Christ as the “source” of faith (p 125). With this interpretation, even the faith(fulness) of God (subj) is something that could be “sought” by the believer.

some sense and have arguments for and against that have about the same strength.

Galatians 3:22

ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτιαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

But the Scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised **through faith in Jesus Christ** [or **through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**] might be given to those who believe.

The third chapter of Galatians is on justification. Paul contrasts the righteousness that is of the law and the righteousness that comes through *πίστις χριστοῦ*. This verse at first seems to support a subjective understanding of the genitive, since it speaks of that which was promised by *πίστις χριστοῦ*—to those who believe. The traditional rendering “through the faith in Christ to those who believe” seems to be a rather peculiar expression, since it expresses the same thing twice. Vv 23–25 could be viewed as speaking strongly for a subjective interpretation of the genitive. Since Paul here seems to speak of a time when there was no *πίστις*, and that the *πίστις* came with Christ, this fits very well with the subjective interpretation.⁴⁰ On the other hand the entire chapter also focuses on Abraham. Abraham’s faith (which is the example for the faith mentioned in 3:22) was clearly a faith directed from Abraham (subject) toward God (object), and as an example this would thus fit better together with an objective interpretation of the passage. The *πίστις* that had come may instead refer to the Christian faith in Christ as saviour.⁴¹ Viewing the *πίστις* as faithfulness in v 23 would open up new problems. This would imply that God was not faithful under the law. Although it could be argued that God was faithful under the law, but *revealed* this with Christ, the OT focus on faithfulness speaks against such a hypothesis.⁴²

Hays boldly calls the RSV translation of Gal 3:22 “faith in Jesus Christ” an “impossible distortion of Paul’s Greek, [which] reflects the awkwardness that results from attempting to make the text say what Paul is usually supposed to mean.”⁴³ After making this bold statement, however, he seems to lack enough arguments to support his position. His basic

⁴⁰ Longenecker 2002, 145.

⁴¹ Montgomery Boice 1976, 467.

⁴² *ZDBT*, s. v. “God, faithfulness of.”

⁴³ Hays 2002, 141.

grammatical arguments are a) Howard’s study, which we already noted is highly questionable, and b) the parallel to “the faith of Abraham” in Rom 4:16, which is not at all a strong argument for the subjective, as we shall see when we study it in further detail below.⁴⁴

Dunn reminds us that if one favours a subjective interpretation of these two Galatian passages, it means that this also makes it possible to take all occurrences of ἐκ πίστεως as references to Christ’s faith in this whole discourse that seems to portray the law in sharp antithesis to faith.⁴⁵ Connecting “the coming of faith” (3:23) and “the coming of the seed (Christ)” may substantiate such a solution. This would mean that Paul’s entire contrast is between the enigmatic “faith of Christ” and “works of the law” and that only the two verbal references (2:16; 3:22) refer to the importance of the Galatians’ own believing. Perhaps this is reading too much into the subjective interpretation of the genitive, but since it presents a possibility, it must still be considered as an important aspect if the subjective interpretation is preferred.

Romans 3:22

δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας.
οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή

the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ** [or **through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**] for all who believe. For there is no distinction

The standard argument for a subjective reading of this passage is, just as in Galatians, that it is strange that Paul repeats himself otherwise. Dunn argues that this is simply to bring more force to Paul’s argumentation on justification by faith, but this could also be too simple a solution.⁴⁶ Barth argued in his commentary on Romans that πίστις should be translated as “faithfulness” since it fits the theology of the letter better.⁴⁷ At the same time, Fitzmyer argues that it cannot be subjective since that would be counter to the main thrust of Paul’s theology.⁴⁸ This contradiction shows

⁴⁴ Ibid., 148–149.

⁴⁵ Dunn 1998, 382.

⁴⁶ Dunn 1988, 167.

⁴⁷ Barth initially translated all occurrences of πίστις as faithfulness, but later reduced the frequency due to critique from professional exegetes (Barth 1922, 80; Myters 2009, 293).

⁴⁸ Fitzmyer 1993, 345.

that a solution from “theology as a whole” is not easy to make. It is important to note that Paul never seems to develop the theme of Christ’s faithfulness. It is not even developed in chapter 4 about Abraham’s faith as a model for the believer, which would have been a very appropriate place to deal with the issue.⁴⁹ Dunn states, that “if Paul wished to draw the attention to the faithfulness of Christ, he missed a few opportunities.”⁵⁰ Moo agrees with Fitzmyer and Dunn, that the main meaning of πίστις in Paul is “faith,” and that strong contextual features are necessary to adopt another meaning.⁵¹ Other prominent scholars such as F. F. Bruce note that the genitive is clearly objective, and Cranfield states that the subjective interpretation is “altogether unconvincing,” however not stating how they came to this conclusion.⁵²

Some have argued that the rendering of Gal 2:16 is evidence enough for the objective interpretation to be the meaning intended by Paul.⁵³ In general, many favouring the subjective interpretation of πίστις χριστοῦ, view the πίστις χριστοῦ of Gal 2:16 as a self-evident subjective and use it as a key of interpretation for the rest of the πίστις χριστοῦ instances. However, I do not consider this to be a satisfactory way of building evidence, since Gal 2:16 itself is ambiguous. Even if it were clear, I think it is important that each occurrence be evaluated in its own right.

The context of this passage could be argued to be more favourable toward a subjective reading of πίστις χριστοῦ, since the focus is on the redeeming and atoning action of Christ in vv 21–26.⁵⁴ But as Dunn legitimately notes, the abrupt introduction of the phrase πίστις χριστοῦ, if taken subjectively, suggests that this πίστις χριστοῦ theme was familiar to the Roman audience, and to early Christianity in general—something that he argues cannot be attested. But, on the other hand, one cannot prove the opposite either. It is probably correct to assume that πίστις χριστοῦ resumes the theme, which is announced in 1:16–17.⁵⁵ V 17 is both interesting and perplexing. The ambiguous ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν formulation seems relevant to this issue, since it seems to speak of two dimensions of faith. From the context it is clear that ἐκ πίστεως refers to Paul’s quote from Habakkuk: ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. Campbell views this as a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Dunn 1988, 166.

⁵¹ Moo 1996, 225.

⁵² Bruce 1963, 102; and Cranfield 1986, 70.

⁵³ Cf Harrison 1976, 41.

⁵⁴ Dunn 1998, 383.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

key to understanding the entire *πίστις χριστοῦ* issue, arguing that Paul’s quote from Hab 2:4 really means “the righteous one by means of faithfulness will live.”⁵⁶ However, Dodd gives a convincing refutation of Campbell’s Christological reading of this passage arguing from the semantics of *πίστις* and the way *πίστις* is used elsewhere in Romans, and I myself also find Campbell’s interpretation to be violating the context in which it is placed.⁵⁷ At the same time, even Dunn seems to admit that Paul probably intends some kind of progression from God’s faithfulness to human faith, although he does not draw as radical conclusions as Campbell.⁵⁸ Comparisons between the different versions of the Habakkuk passage present an interesting reading. Especially the LXX is interesting, since it explicitly states that God’s faith(fulness) is what is meant, while in Hebrews, the personal pronoun is attributed to “the righteous one.”⁵⁹

Masoretic Text	וַיְחַיֵּךְ בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יְהוָה	the righteous one shall live by his faith(fulness)
LXX	ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται	the righteous one shall live by my faith(fulness) (or my righteous one shall live by faith(fulness))
Romans 1:17	ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται	the righteous one shall live by faith(fulness)
Hebrews 10:38	ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται	my righteous one shall live by faith(fulness)

This comparison of versions may seem to confuse the matter further, but when studying the passage in Habakkuk it becomes clear from the original context of the quote that this verse expresses the necessity of humans being faithful toward God.⁶⁰ But if Paul had the LXX rendering in mind, this could still support a subjective understanding of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. However, since he does not use the personal pronoun this is less likely. If we therefore assume that he had in mind the context from where he took his quote,

⁵⁶ Campbell 2009, 57–71.

⁵⁷ Dodd 1995, 470–473.

⁵⁸ Dunn 1988, 44.

⁵⁹ Ibid. It should be noted that Rom 1:17 also includes *μου* in some manuscripts

⁶⁰ Smith 1984, 107. It may also be illuminating to study the use of the Hebrew preposition *ב*, and see whether it is best understood as an instrumental preposition, or if there is some other category which would fit better and thus help our understanding of this passage. Due to the limited scope of this article, we shall not deal with that issue.

we instead end up with the data pointing more toward an objective interpretation. When one takes into consideration that Paul usually uses the LXX when quoting the OT, it is very interesting that he does not stick to it here.⁶¹ This would point toward Paul wishing to emphasise something different than what was emphasised in the LXX. If the subjective interpretation were correct, and 1:17 is a key for understanding the concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*, it would be remarkable that Paul deviates from the LXX here. This weakens the argumentation for a subjective interpretation in 1:17, and rather strengthens the argument for an objective interpretation. However, I also find Campbell's interpretation of the LXX itself to be highly questionable. The *μου* is not necessarily connected to *πίστις*, but might actually be connected to *ὁ δίκαιος*. This may be more a more probable translation, since it more closely corresponds to the rendering in Hebrews, and makes more sense in the original context of Habakkuk. This would also point toward the traditional objective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*.

After dealing with the Habakkuk quote, the phrase *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν* still seems rather ambiguous. The prepositions may help us understand this phrase better. In this instance, *ἐκ* must be taken in its instrumental sense, indicating origin or source.⁶² As for *εἰς*, it should be seen as a reference to a figurative goal or state, with a directional, though not literal, sense to it.⁶³ Thus, *πίστις* is the point of departure, but *πίστις* is also the direction of the journey. From the beginning of the verse, it is clear that the phrase deals with justification. Harrison suggests that this conveys the necessity of remembering that the justifying faith is only the beginning of Christian life, and the same attitude must govern also in a continued walk with God.⁶⁴

Romans 3:26

ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν **ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ**.⁶⁵

It was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has **faith in Jesus** [or **the one who is of the faithfulness of Jesus**].

⁶¹ Jones 2007, 5.

⁶² Porter 1992, 155.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁴ Harrison 1976, 19–20.

⁶⁵ Some witnesses add *χριστοῦ*, but this is probably just a scribal addition; cf. Metzger 1994, 449.

The fascinating thing about this verse is that the last few words are traditionally translated as “he who believes in Jesus” although the construction τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ consists of a definite article, a preposition and two nouns—but no verb. Thus we must ask ourselves whether it is really necessary to make a translation paraphrastic in this way? In Koine Greek, ἐκ is basically synonymous with ἀπό.⁶⁶ Semantically, ἐκ also overlaps with ἐν in Koine; hence it can also refer to “the realm out of which (ἐκ) something originates.”⁶⁷ Is it necessary to paraphrase this phrase using verbs when translating, or does this distort its original meaning? If we simply made a literal translation it would read something like “declaring righteous him who is of (originates from) the faithfulness of Jesus/faith in Jesus.” At the same time we must remember that the most literal rendering is not necessarily the one that conveys the same meaning as the original author wished to convey.

Philippians 3:9

καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν **διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ**, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει,

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes **through faith in Christ [or through the faithfulness of Christ]**, the righteousness from God based on faith

Hawthorne and Martin emphasise that although righteousness has its origin in God (ἐκ θεοῦ), it is appropriated by a person through faith in Christ.⁶⁸ The dative locative preposition ἐπὶ could be used in both directions; either pointing to our faith that is necessary for the righteousness of God, or Christ’s faith that is necessary for the same. Those proposing an objective interpretation connect it to the previous πίστεως, while those proposing a subjective interpretation argue (just like in the case of Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:22) that two kinds of πίστις are contrasted against each other here.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Blomqvist and Jastrup 1991, 199.

⁶⁷ Porter 1992, 154.

⁶⁸ Hawthorne and Martin 2004, 195.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 195; and Bockmuehl 1998, 211–212.

Πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ in Romans 3:3

In Rom 3:3, ἡ πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ is generally understood subjectively as the faith(fulness) of God.⁷⁰ There are two aspects of this verse that affect the discussion on πίστις χριστοῦ: first of all this may be used as proof that God actually has πίστις, which would be supportive of the subjective position. The other is to compare the grammatical relationship between this, probably subjective phrase, and the πίστις χριστοῦ construction. Howard interprets Rom 3:3 as a passage that deals with God's faith(fulness), which is operating in spite of man's lack of faith.⁷¹ He connects this to πίστις χριστοῦ, but also to the faith of Abraham. It is legitimate to connect the faith of God to πίστις χριστοῦ, but the connection between this and the faith of Abraham in 4:16 in terms of "making the promise secure for all nations" is not obvious. Although the mentioned reference points toward one person securing a promise for all nations, this phrase alone does not convey the message of the passage as a whole. In the context, it is rather obvious that the "faith of Abraham" refers to Abraham's faith toward God, and that the ones spoken of in this verse are those who believe in God in the same way as Abraham. Returning to 3:3, it is interesting to note the dichotomy between πίστις and ἀπιστία. What does this refer to? Is it the unfaithfulness of the people that is contrasted with the faithfulness of God, or is it the disbelief of the people that is contrasted with the faith of God? Or, is it even the disbelief of the people of Israel, contrasted with the faith *in* God (in Christ)? BDAG connects this ἀπιστία to unfaithfulness toward God.⁷² However, v 3 makes it very clear that the ἀπιστία of Israel has been committed on an individual basis, since there were only *some* who did not believe/were unfaithful. Thus, this verse does not deal with the collective ἀπιστία of a people, but the ἀπιστία of certain individuals, thus requiring an active decision on their part, which is contrasted with the πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ. With this individual πίστις/ἀπιστία dimension in mind, it is interesting to go back to 3:22 and read about the righteousness διὰ πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας. The more individual emphasis on faith that is put forth by Paul in 3:3 may perhaps point toward an objective interpretation of 3:22 since this would reflect the "individual focus" of Paul more accurately. At the same time, it may be argued that the individual perspective is already there through τοὺς πιστεύοντας and that the πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is parallel to the πίστιν τοῦ

⁷⁰ BDAG, s. v. "πίστις," 818–819.

⁷¹ Howard 1990, 58.

⁷² BDAG, "ἀπιστία," 102.

θεοῦ in 3:3. Even though we noted that there is an individual dimension to the ἀπιστία, the most natural is still to interpret ὁ πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ subjectively as “faith(fulness) of God,” since God’s righteousness and truth is contrasted to man’s unrighteousness and falsehood in the following verses. However, it is important to state that what has been concluded concerning 3:3 does not necessarily make πίστις χριστοῦ subjective. The faithfulness of God is not in contradiction to faith *in* Christ. However, the subjective reading of Rom 3:3 presents evidence for God having πίστις, which is necessary if one understands πίστις χριστοῦ subjectively.

Πίστις Χριστοῦ Outside the Undisputed Pauline Letters: Ephesians 3:12

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει **διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ.**

in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence **through our faith in him [or through his faithfulness].**

It is often claimed that the use of the article determines which type of genitive is meant; an article indicates subjective genitive while the lack of an article indicates an objective genitive. Sometimes a connection is made to the use of the article in Semitic languages.⁷³ Using the article as a marker of subjective genitive would distinguish this occurrence of πίστις χριστοῦ from the others since it has the article. However, too much emphasis should not be put on this element since it is also widely recognised that this means of discerning the type of genitive has very many exceptions.⁷⁴

Lincoln argues that the genitive should be interpreted objectively since the letter as a whole (cf 1:13, 15, 19; 2:8) refers to the faith, which is directed from the believer toward God.⁷⁵ On the other hand, one of these verses could actually also be seen as a strong argument for a subjective interpretation. When it is stated in 2:8 that one is saved “by grace through faith,” it is clear that the grace is something that proceeds from God, and it would therefore not be totally strange to ascribe the agency to God also in the case of faith. The author even specifies in 2:8b that it is not of our own doing, but the gift of God.⁷⁶ As forceful as this argument may seem, it is

⁷³ Hultgren 1980, 253, 257.

⁷⁴ Cf Bell 2009, 121, note 57.

⁷⁵ Lincoln 1990, 190.

⁷⁶ Foster 2009, 107.

not unquestionable. It is important to see that *διὰ* is here probably used in its instrumental sense.⁷⁷ This would mean that *grace* is a gift from God, and not of our own doing, but that it comes by the instrument of *faith*, which must be performed by the individual believer, thus supporting the objective interpretation. Barth interprets the preposition *διὰ* having causal meaning.⁷⁸ However, the causal meaning is connected to the accusative case. But *διὰ* is put in the genitive case, which would rather suggest instrumental meaning.⁷⁹

Other Possible References in the New Testament

Mk 11:22 presents a problem very similar to *πίστις χριστοῦ* with its formulation *ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ*. If this is taken as an objective genitive it is unique to the NT, but if taken as subjective it may have a counterpart in Rom 3:3.⁸⁰ Since the pericope as such is about believing in God, the genitive should most probably be interpreted objectively. Bolt's suggestion that it should be interpreted as "you have the faithfulness of God" is implausible, when taking v 24 into consideration, since this verse clearly speaks of the disciples' act of believing, taking *ἔχετε* as an imperative.⁸¹

Another passage, perhaps more relevant to the *πίστις χριστοῦ* debate, is Jas 2:1, where we have an occurrence that reads *ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης*. This verse would help us in understanding *πίστις χριστοῦ* if it were clear and easy to understand. However, this verse has been subject to much debate, including the role of *τῆς δόξης* in the sentence.⁸² Since the interpretation of this passage is fraught with difficulties, it does not help us much in bringing clarity to the debated instances of *πίστις χριστοῦ* in Paul. However, I hardly think that Lowe's suggested translation "My dear brothers and sisters, here is my proposition (to be discussed according to honour): show no partiality as you possess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" is self-evident.⁸³

⁷⁷ Porter 1992, 149.

⁷⁸ Barth 1974, 347.

⁷⁹ Porter 1992, 149–150. Furthermore, there are some syntactic issues that complicate Barth's interpretation even more (cf. Bell 2009, 121).

⁸⁰ Evans 2002, 186.

⁸¹ Bolt 2009, 212. Bolt, arguing for a subjective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*, also suggests that Mark 9:23 contains a reference to the faith of Christ (ibid., 215). However, this would require equating *πειθῶ* with *πιστεύω*, and from the context it seems like it is the father rather than Christ, who is the one who is supposed to believe (cf. v. 24).

⁸² Martin 2002, 59.

⁸³ Lowe 2009, 253.

Also the Book of Revelation contains two constructions that are similar to *πίστις χριστοῦ*; 2:13 (*τὴν πίστιν μου*) and 14:12 (*τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ*). DeSilva argues that both of these phrases are to be taken subjectively as referring to the faithfulness of Christ, also viewing faithfulness as the primary meaning of *πίστις* in Revelation.⁸⁴ However, when reading these two passages in their context it is evident that they are about believers who do not deny their faith in Christ, but cling to it. It is of course possible that John intends to say that they cling to Christ's faithfulness and do not deny it, but since Jesus would naturally be the agent of his own faithfulness one would need some good arguments to interpret it in this way. Thus, it is more probable that these passages should be interpreted in a way that supports the objective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*.⁸⁵

4. Theological Considerations

Traditional Protestant teaching on justification states that one is justified through faith in Christ. If the subjective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ* were true, the next question would naturally be how this may affect the Protestant teaching on "justification by faith." A subjective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ* would shift the focus of Paul's theology from justification to participation in Christ.⁸⁶ We shall now approach the debated instances together, and seek to find some Pauline system of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. In order to do this we shall study Paul's view of the relationship between *πίστις* and justification. Since Paul's main example of this faith is Abraham, we shall first deal with Romans 4, where he develops his theology on the faith of Abraham in greatest detail.

The Faith of Abraham

A pivotal ingredient in understanding Paul's argumentation for justification by faith in both Romans and Galatians is how he exemplifies his point by speaking of Abraham. First of all, it is necessary to investigate

⁸⁴ DeSilva 2009 274.

⁸⁵ By this I do not wish to say that it is theologically impossible that Christ has *πίστις*. However, we do not find the theme of Christ's *πίστις* being developed in the NT, and thus our knowledge of its potential nature is limited.

⁸⁶ Just 2006, 14–15. Just argues that especially Lutherans have often stressed justification on the expense of the participation perspective, which he argues is really the foundation for justification.

the phrase ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ in Rom 4:16. It has been argued that this would point toward a subjective reading of πίστις χριστοῦ, since no one would try to argue that it should be interpreted objectively in this instance (faith in Abraham).⁸⁷ Kittel boldly states that “Will man nicht behaupten, daß Paulus von einem Glauben an Abraham redet, so muss man auch zugeben, daß er bei dem Korrelativen Ausdruck von einem Glauben an Christus nicht hat reden wollen.”⁸⁸ At the same time, this argument cannot be regarded as conclusive, since the question of subjective/objective genitive must be judged *in each individual case*. When looking at this type of argument from the context, I think it is important not just to look at the grammatical construction, but also at the message that Paul is seeking to convey as a whole. When doing so, one may notice that the faith of Abraham in itself is not what Paul is aiming at, but rather he uses Abraham’s faith, which was directed toward God, as an example for the faith he is describing (cf 4:17).⁸⁹ Ulrichs puts it this way: “Der Glaube Abrahams ist dem unseren, was die Bezugsgröße und den Inhalt betrifft, analog.”⁹⁰ This would point toward Paul having an “objective understanding” of πίστις χριστοῦ as a whole, since the faith is to be directed from human beings toward God. Also taking into consideration 4:11, where Abraham is called father of all who believe (πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων), it rather seems like Paul wishes to stress that the person being justified should believe actively, in the same way that Abraham did.⁹¹

The Faith of Abraham as Common Denominator

Having studied Paul’s use of Abraham as an example of πίστις, we shall now turn to the debated instances and see how the faith of Abraham is consequently used as an example of faith. In the previous section, we analysed the occurrences of πίστις χριστοῦ in their immediate context. However, if we are to view πίστις χριστοῦ as a concept we must also make a comparative study of the contexts in which these occurrences appear. As I have already noted, Romans and Galatians are very similar in theme. Both

⁸⁷ Cf Hays 2002, 149; and Haussleiter 1895, 110–111.

⁸⁸ Kittel 1906, 424.

⁸⁹ Campbell (2009, 389) prefers speaking of Abraham’s trust rather than his faith, however, Wallis notes that his faith is not simply “trust,” but rather is an active response, since it includes sexual intercourse with his barren wife (1995, 92.)

⁹⁰ Ulrichs 2007, 205. He also relates to the contemporary German Luther-bible where 4:16 reads “die wie Abraham aus dem Glauben leben,” thus making clear that Abraham and his descendants are similar in that they *have faith in God*. (2007, 208).

⁹¹ Matlock 2007, 186.

deal with justification by faith in Christ/Christ's faithfulness. Paul contrasts *πίστις* with works of the law. However, Paul does not seem to view *πίστις* and the law as total antitheses, since he also states that the law is not overthrown by *πίστις*, but rather upheld by the believers (Rom 3:31). Both Romans and Galatians draw parallels to the faith of Abraham and have him as an example of faith. In Philippians, *πίστις χριστοῦ* is also put into the context of justification by *πίστις*. Paul retells his efforts to achieve righteousness by the law, and concludes that justification cannot be achieved by works of the law, but only through *πίστις*. Philippians has no reference to Abraham, but the main plot still seems to be the same, and thus a reference to Abraham would fit perfectly in Philippians, if Paul had developed the theme further.

The theme of Ephesians does not seem to be exactly the same at first sight, since *πίστις χριστοῦ* is not placed within a discussion on law, *πίστις* and justification. However, a closer look will show that there are actually several similarities. The Ephesians are claimed to be saved by *πίστις*, as a gift from God, and not by deeds—a parallel to the justification by *πίστις* contra works of the law in the other epistles. Then Ephesians goes on to tell how the Gentiles have become part of Israel through *πίστις*, and not through deeds. Even though Abraham is not explicitly mentioned, the Gentiles who believe are spoken of as becoming co-heirs of Israel, and sharing the same promise (3:6). Although it cannot be settled for sure, it is probable that the promise referred to is God's promise to Abraham, thus making the thematic connection between these passages clear.⁹² The reference to the promise in connection to the covenant in 2:12 makes an even clearer connection to Abraham, when one takes into account Paul's distinction between the promise given to Abraham and the law connected to the Sinaitic covenant as expounded in Gal 3:16–22.⁹³

Thus, we may conclude that there is indeed a thematic connection between the *πίστις χριστοῦ* instances, which deals with justification by *πίστις*, and that this theme has some sort of connection to Abraham. The faith of Abraham is a key concept for settling the *πίστις χριστοῦ* issue, since this is the concrete point of reference Paul uses from the OT. If the faith(fulness) of Christ were what was meant by Paul, it is strange that he still chooses to take Abraham as the foremost example, rather than devel-

⁹² Schniewind and Friedrich 1964, 585–585.

⁹³ Lincoln 2002, 137.

oping how the *πίστις* worked in and through Christ himself.⁹⁴ Thus, I would say, that if one looks at the total picture given by the contexts of the seven passages altogether, it is more natural with an objective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*, since this is the way in which the *πίστις* was practiced by Abraham, the example of *πίστις*.

What is the Nature of Pauline πίστις?

After this long discussion the crucial question arises: what, then, is the nature of *πίστις*? Paul's most thorough discourse on the meaning of *πίστις* to the common believer is found in Romans 4, when relating to Abraham as being justified by faith.⁹⁵ Rom 1:17 states that righteousness is *revealed* through the gospel. Thus the gospel reveals something that was already present in the OT, only in a more hidden way.⁹⁶ In Rom 4, Paul shows how justification by faith worked in the OT, and the same way of justification has now been revealed through the gospel. A key verse is 4:3, where it is stated that Abraham believed God, and it was *reckoned* to him as righteousness.⁹⁷ Thus, Abraham's faith did not perform justification in itself, but rather it lead to God's reckoning him as righteous anyway due to his faith, which is reflected in the passive form of *ἐλογίσθη*. With this as background, Paul uses this as a model for Christian justification in 4:22–25. He states that righteousness is reckoned (*λογίζεσθαι*) unto us *who believe* in him who raised Jesus from the dead. Here, too, Paul uses an aorist passive to describe how believers have righteousness reckoned unto themselves. Paul thus explains that righteousness is reckoned unto a person (God is the agent) *on the basis that* one believes in Christ (the believer as agent). Faith is thus not to be viewed as a work that in itself can justify the believer—righteousness is not a direct result of faith—but rather as something that God bestows upon a person on the basis of faith. Hence, faith itself does not justify human beings, but as a result of someone's belief, God will actively justify that person. Here it is clear that it is faith in God, rather than God's faithfulness, that is the prerequisite for being reckoned unto righteousness.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Morris 1993, 288.

⁹⁵ Dunn 1998, 374.

⁹⁶ Harrison 1976, 47.

⁹⁷ Hooker 1990, 170.

⁹⁸ Campbell argues, that *πίστις* should really be interpreted as the "faithfulness of Abraham" (2009, 394). This translation may be legitimate; it is, however, problematic to view Abraham as being analogous with Christ. Abraham was justified through his *πίστις* (Rom 4:1), but Christ, with a subjective interpretation, would justify *others* through *his πίστις*.

As noted above, the faith of Abraham is somehow mentioned in connection with all the debated instances of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. In Gal 3, between the *πίστις χριστοῦ* verses, Paul deals with the faith of Abraham. Paul once again quotes Gen 15:6 and states that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him unto righteousness (Gal 3:6), and commends the Galatians to have the same faith as Abraham. Interestingly, he also quotes Hab 2:4 (just like in Rom 1:17) and sets this against being justified by works of the law. Paul concludes that the law of Moses has not replaced God's promise to Abraham, and those who have become the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus have become heirs according to God's promise to Abraham (Gal 3:26–29).

Also the passage in Philippians has similar elements. Here, too, faith is something that must come from the believer, but salvation comes only by God's grace—however, as a result of faith. This also fits very well together with what Barr considers to be the OT concept of faith: the basic meaning of faith is some sort of trust that is directed from the believer toward God.⁹⁹ Turning to Ephesians, the author does not mention Abraham, but it is clear also here that the concept of faith being reckoned unto righteousness is present. Ephesians states that one is saved by grace through faith—not by own doing, but as a gift from God.

*Is There a Concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*?*

A relevant question in this article must be: is there even a reason to speak of a concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*? If it were so that all the debated instances specifically read *πίστις χριστοῦ*, one could assume that this might be a theological concept used by Paul (although it would not have to be so). However, the case is that we have a variety of expressions, all considered to belong to the same group of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. In actual fact, Paul never develops this potential concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. This is one of the major problems for a subjective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. Dunn notes that this interpretation “depends on an assumption that Christ's faithfulness was a familiar theme, to which the phrase would naturally recall its Roman [or other] audiences.”¹⁰⁰ However, we never find Paul developing this theme of Christ's faithfulness, not even in Rom 4, where it would have been appropriate, since we find a long elaboration on the nature of

⁹⁹ Barr 1961, 166.

¹⁰⁰ Dunn 1998, 383.

faith.¹⁰¹ Dunn argues that since *πίστις* as a religious term referring to trust or belief was familiar in the Hellenistic world, this would be the most probable interpretation, while using it as “faithfulness” would require a whole deal of unpacking.¹⁰²

Perhaps modern scholars have been making a mountain out of a mole-hill with *πίστις χριστοῦ*. The term relates to passages that do not contain the same phrase, but simply *πίστις* and some kind of reference to Jesus, with an ambiguous genitive construction. To use this as basis for a theological concept is a little bit too vague. As we have seen there are thematic similarities in the contexts where the relevant passages are situated, but it should also be said that they appear in the places where *πίστις* is dealt with in detail, so there is still no reason to make *πίστις χριστοῦ* into a separate theological concept.¹⁰³ This especially goes for those advocating more of an objective interpretation, such as Ulrichs. Even though he prefers the classical protestant interpretation “faith in Christ,” he tries to read this concept into e. g. 1 Thess 1:3. But if the objective interpretation is correct, it is necessary neither to do this, nor to analyse Pauline soteriology from a *πίστις χριστοῦ*-perspective. We must not force a concept into Pauline theology that simply is not there and is not intended by Paul himself.

Conclusion

There is no simple and clear-cut solution to the question. However, there are some aspects pointing in a certain direction. The grammar helps us understand the nature of the problem, but also reveals something of the

¹⁰¹ Fitzmyer 1993, 345.

¹⁰² Dunn 1993, 138.

¹⁰³ Those who interpret *πίστις χριστοῦ* subjectively have various theories of what the faith(fulness) of Christ really consists of. Some view it as Christ’s faith in God, especially as an incarnated being (Goodenough and Kraabel 1968, 45), making the believer’s role to share in the faith of Christ himself (Hooker 1990, 186). Such views are often summarised by the term “Christ-faith,” which does not exclusively refer Christ’s own faith, but includes that of the believer (Williams 1987, 431–447). However, most contemporary proponents of the subjective interpretation would rather relate *πίστις χριστοῦ* to Christ’s faithfulness, manifested in his obedience to the Father through his sacrificial death (Wright 2005, 120). Thus, the focus is moved away from *Christ* justifying *believers* and rather points to *believers* participating in *Christ*, and his sacrificial death. Hultgren manages to integrate the participation-element of the subjective interpretation into the objective, by claiming that it is not purely objective, but carries some Semitic influences of the genitive of quality (Hultgren 1980, 262–263). He concludes “this faith is both identified with and made possible by God’s justifying act in Christ, which is proclaimed in the gospel and made effective for those who believe” (ibid).

complexity of the issue. Grammar itself does not offer a satisfactory solution, but points us to looking at the context of *πίστις χριστοῦ* instead. When studying *πίστις χριστοῦ* in its immediate contexts, it appears that there are good arguments supporting both the objective and subjective interpretation. However, when comparing the contexts in which *πίστις χριστοῦ* is situated, we find that all occurrences are found in passages where Paul contrasts works and faith as means of justification. The five occurrences that are found in Galatians and Romans portray Abraham as being an example of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. The occurrence in Philippians, but also the one in Ephesians, speaks of the Gentiles becoming co-heirs in Israel through faith, thus making them “spiritual” descendants of Abraham. Abraham can thus be seen as a key figure in understanding *πίστις χριστοῦ* in its context. The example of Abraham clearly supports an objective interpretation of *πίστις χριστοῦ*, since Abraham’s faith was something that was directed from Abraham toward God.

Although there have been attempts to systematise an understanding of “faith of God,” it is very hard to draw any conclusions from the information gained from the Pauline corpus or from other NT texts. God is indeed described as having *πίστις*, probably referring to his covenant faithfulness (Rom 3:3). However, an idea of God having faith that works salvation for human beings without requiring a response of faith is highly problematic to substantiate. It is, in fact, difficult to argue even for the existence of a concept of *πίστις χριστοῦ*. *Πίστις* related to Jesus with an ambiguous genitive relationship is probably not a theological concept of its own, but simply a grammatical relationship that happens to occur in Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. Nowhere does Paul develop a theology of the “faith(fulness) of Christ” and therefore it is unnecessary for us to try to read this into his thought. Paul argues for justification through faith in Christ on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross. Thus faith in Christ is *dependent* on Christ (and, if you will, his faithfulness/obedience unto the death on the cross, Phil 2:8), but is directed from the believer toward Christ, just as in the example of Abraham. As Hultgren notes, *πίστις χριστοῦ* probably has some qualitative sense to it, but the main point is that believers should direct their faith toward Christ in order to be justified.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Hultgren 1980, 262–63.

Thus we may conclude that interpreting *πίστις χριστοῦ* subjectively, although linguistically possible, is not plausible. A subjective interpretation would add dimensions to Pauline theology that are never developed in the NT. Although this is not a conclusive argument, Paul mentioning many things that he never develops fully in his letters, the objective interpretation makes it *easier* for us to understand Paul. While the subjective interpretation leads to speculation, the objective interpretation relates back to themes that are developed in the NT and makes the NT as a whole more understandable, since they belong not only to the main thrust of Pauline theology, but to NT theology as a whole. Hence *πίστις χριστοῦ* refers to the faith in Christ that leads to God justifying the believer, and the phrase does not refer to a specific theological concept, but is rather an integrated part of Paul's soteriology.

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