

Πίστις Χριστοῦ

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Introduction:

The Bible has proven to be a foundational document of western culture. Regardless of personal religious inclination, much of Western society, policy, and culture is rooted in biblical principles and ideas. In particular, the writings and teachings of the two key figures in the New Testament -- Jesus and Paul -- have had a monumental influence on Western culture. Paul is one of the most iconic and emblematic figures of the New Testament, thus having significant influence throughout the western world and beyond. Understanding the writings of Paul and their indications about the character of Christ is crucial to developing sound Christian doctrine. The phrase “salvation comes through faith in Christ,” forms the basis upon which many Christian denominations build their soteriology. This phrase is derived from the Greek phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ found three times in various Pauline writings. This Greek phrase is translated as either “faith in Christ” (the more familiar option) or “faithfulness of Christ” (which is understood in scholarly circles, but largely unreferenced in the sacred arena). Proper interpretation of this phrase radically impacts Pauline Christology, as well as Paul’s view of soteriology. The πίστις Χριστοῦ debate involves the investigation of Paul’s letters, but also provides implications about who Jesus was and the nature and extent of his significance. Paul uses πίστις Χριστοῦ in his discussion of Gentile justification with the various communities to which he writes. The implication of this translation choice has soteriological significance, and this issue is significant in scholarly debate because the interpretation of this phrase drastically impacts interpretation of the Pauline letters.

The heart of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate is a translation issue of the Greek genitive case ending of the proper noun *Christou*. The issue in the Pauline phrase is whether the phrase πίστις

Χριστοῦ is to be read as a subjective genitive—“faith of Christ”, or as an objective genitive—“faith in Christ. This phrasing appears in several key passages in Paul’s writings, including in Romans 3:22, Galatians 3:22, and Philippians 3:9. Prior to Richard B. Hays’ monumental work *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, Paul was widely identified as an anti-Jewish Christian convert, and this traditional view of Paul dictated the interpretation of his letters in a way that heavily influenced church structure, theology, and even biblical translation. This view of Paul became a lens through which his letters were, and still are, interpreted, and the impact extends to their translation, thus influencing the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. In 1983, Hays published his monograph on this Greek phrase which brought the πίστις Χριστοῦ passage to the forefront of debate among religious scholars. His book, among other texts such as the writings of Morna D. Hooker, John G. Gager and Krister Stendahl will be referenced in the development of this paper. This paper will prove that the proper way to translate πίστις Χριστοῦ in the Pauline writings is to use the subjective genitive, so the phrase is translated “faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” However, this paper will argue that the duality of the genitive, while correctly rendered as “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ,” does not negate the simultaneous indication of the human component of faith. The soteriology of this translation reflects a view of Christ as the author of salvation. Morna D. Hooker states it this way: “...it may well be that the answer to the question ‘Does this phrase refer to Christ’s faith or ours?’ may be ‘Both.’ Nevertheless, that faith/faithfulness is primarily that of Christ, and we share in it only because we are in him.”¹

This paper will be organized into sections as follows: Part 1 will explain the aspects of grammar and translation from Greek within the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, Part 2 will provide a

¹ Hooker, Morna D. “Another Look at Πίστις Χριστοῦ.” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2016, p. 46–62. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1017/S0036930615000770.

background on Paul, his culture, and his religion, Part 3 will focus on interpretation by describing the Roman and Galatian audiences to whom Paul was writing, as well as an in depth look at the specific passages in which the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is found, and Part 4 will provide a conclusion as well as the implications of this debate.

Part 1: Grammar

To understand the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, a basic discussion of the structure of the phrase must first be established. Hays summarizes this component of the debate when he says “with regard to the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, the fundamental grammatical question is whether πίστις followed by a proper noun in the genitive case should be understood to mean ‘faith *in* X’ (objective genitive) or ‘faith *of* X’ (subjective genitive).”² *A Digital Tutorial for Ancient Greek* explains “in English, readers rely on the order in which words appear in a sentence to indicate the grammatical function of each word. In Ancient Greek, their case tells the reader the grammatical function of each word in the sentence.”³ The Greek language is considered an inflected language, which means that the case ending of the specific noun, or its inflection, indicates its usage within a sentence. The case ending of words in Greek are designated by additions to the word, and there are various ending options. The subject of a sentence is identified by the nominative case, which is the most basic form of the word. Additional elements defined by cases include the direct object, indicated by the accusative case, the indirect object, indicated by the dative case, and even possession within a sentence, which utilizes the genitive

² Hays, Richard B. *The Faith of Jesus Christ: an Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*. Scholars Press, 1983. p.148

³ Rydberg-Cox, Jeff. “A Digital Tutorial for Ancient Greek Based on John William White's First Greek Book.” John Williams White-First Greek Book, daedalus.umkc.edu/FirstGreekBook/.

case. English only shows inflection in its pronouns, therefore it primarily relies not on the inflection of the word but instead on the order of words in a sentence, the use of apostrophes, and the incorporation of auxiliary words to indicate and distinguish these components within a sentence. For instance, the sentences “this is the home of Sarah” and “this is Sarah’s home,” describe possession using the order of words, the use of the auxiliary word “of,” or the incorporation of an apostrophe. Furthermore, the sentences “Alex gave Sarah this house” and “Alex gave this house to Sarah” indicate “Sarah” as the indirect object and “this house” as the direct object by controlling the order of the words in the sentence or including the auxiliary word “to.” In the English language, the order of words in the sentence, the use of auxiliary words such as “of,” “for,” and “to,” and the incorporation of an apostrophe can all indicate possession as well as the grammatical function of words within a sentence.

In contrast, within inflected languages the order of words is irrelevant to the distinguishing of various parts of the sentence, and the use of auxiliary words or apostrophes to determine these things is non-existent. In the Greek language the grammatical function of words is determined by the case endings of words. The Greek language employs many different noun endings to determine different word functions within the sentence. For instance, the Greek language includes gender endings that indicate whether a word is masculine, feminine, or neuter, as well as endings that designate singular or plural nouns. An example of this is the Greek noun “Χριστός” which is translated as “Christ” in English. This is the nominative, singular, masculine form of the word, which utilizes the “ός” ending to distinguish it as the subject of a sentence. This same word written in the genitive, singular, masculine case would appear as “Χριστοῦ,” which differs from the nominative form due to its “οῦ” ending. Even within the genitive case in

Greek, there are various forms such as the objective genitive and the subjective genitive. The phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is written in this genitive case, which could be translated in English as “faith *in* Christ” or “faith *of* Christ.” A “faith *in* Christ” translation would argue for the objective genitive (Christ being the object of faith), while a “faith *of* Christ” translation would argue for the subjective genitive (Christ being the subject who acts with or has faith). This is the crux of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. The complex case structure of the Greek language is a linguistic system that differs significantly from that of the English language, which can create translational issues and inconsistencies.

When discerning which way this phrase should be translated, it is necessary to consider other instances in Paul’s writings where this phrase is used. Hays relies upon the accounting of George Howard when he explains that “apart from the disputed cases in which the genitive is Χριστοῦ or its equivalent... Howard tabulates twenty-four such instances, of which twenty refer to the faith of Christians, two to the faith of Abraham... and one to the faithfulness of God (Rom 3:3). Thus in every instance in which πίστις is followed by a proper noun or pronoun in the genitive case, the genitive is unmistakably subjective.”⁴ Hays establishes that within the Pauline writings, the genitive is consistently read as subjective. Though Hays confirms that the objective genitive is indeed possible in New Testament Greek, he emphasizes that the objective genitive “cannot be demonstrated in the Pauline corpus.”⁵

Scholars across the board agree that though the grammatical components are necessary to analyze, the argument must advance past grammar and into the theological arena. The implications of this translation transcend borders of grammar and linguistics and are significant

⁴ Hays, *The Faith*, 148

⁵ Hays, *The Faith*, 149

to establishing sound doctrine, so to establish a stance on the accurate translation of this phrase scholars agree it is necessary to transition into contextual and theological analysis.

Part 2: Paul

The Man

When determining the appropriate translation of this phrase in Pauline letters, it is important to first establish an understanding of who Paul was, the purpose for which he wrote, the audiences to whom he wrote, and the cultural context of his letters. This background discussion sheds light on the obstacles faced when attempting to accurately interpret and translate this text. There are significant cultural, linguistic, and contextual differences between a first-century Jew from Asia Minor and Bible readers from 21st century Western culture. In Esler's *Galatians* he describes that an accurate interpretation of Paul's letters can only be attempted after gaining a thorough grasp of these major socio-cultural differences and making efforts to overcome them through increased awareness of Paul's background and cultural context:

Unless we take steps positively to overcome this barrier, to comprehend the meanings of their utterances in their first-century contexts, we will never come near to understanding what they are saying, just as we discover today, if we travel or live among peoples of foreign cultures, that mere facility with the local language is no guarantee of understanding.⁶

Before examining the passages in which πίστις Χριστοῦ appears, we must first establish some facts about Paul and the communities to which he wrote. Paul was born Jewish, and

⁶ Esler, Philip Francis. *Galatians*. Routledge, 1998. p.3

claimed to be exemplary in every aspect of the religion. In Philippians 3:4-6 he describes the nature of his Jewish heritage and practice:

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul considered himself admirable in every respect within the Jewish religion. In line with the majority of Jewish leaders in his day, Paul initially did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah. He would have viewed the act of following Jesus as a breach of Jewish law and tradition. His response to this “heretical” movement was to persecute Jesus-followers in an attempt to remain and continue to establish himself as a righteous Jew. It was not until his vision on his way to Damascus that his perspective on Jewish piety was so dramatically transformed. Paul was born Saul of Tarsus, but after his experience while journeying to Damascus he was given the name Paul, a name change that represented his new calling. In Galatians 1:13-24 Paul describes this transformation:

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles... Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God because of me.

“Saul,” the orthodox Pharisee, sought to root out the heresy within Judaism that proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah of God; “Paul,” the recipient of a vision of the risen Christ, followed his call to serve as apostle to the Gentiles and became the face of the Jesus movement.

Throughout his letters Paul identifies himself as the one sent to the Gentiles. In Galatians 1:15-16 Paul describes this apostolic calling: “God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.” Gager summarizes the traditional view of Paul as “[his] gospel stands in opposition to the law; his Christianity is the antithesis of Judaism... Paul underwent a typical conversion from one religion to another, in this case Judaism to Christianity.”⁷ The traditional view of Paul would describe the transformation of Saul to Paul as a “conversion,” however the accounts of this experience use the language of “call” rather than conversion. Stendahl describes that “rather than being ‘converted,’ Paul was called to the specific task-made clear to him by his experience of the risen Lord-of apostleship to the Gentiles, one hand-picked through Jesus Christ on behalf of the one God of Jews and Gentiles.”⁸ The experience of being called by God is demonstrated throughout the Old Testament. Moses was called in Exodus 3:14-15 when God said to Moses “I am who I am. You must tell them: ‘The one who is called I Am has sent me to you.’ Tell the Israelites that I, the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have sent you to them.” This instance reflects a sending rather than a conversion. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus mirrors this calling in that Moses was sent to the Israelites as Paul was sent to the Gentiles. Abram was similarly “called” in Genesis 12 1-2: “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house

⁷ Gager, John G. *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford University Press, 2002 p.21

⁸ Stendahl, Krister. *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. Fortress Press, 1976. p.7

to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” Abram’s encounter with God was not depicted as one of conversion, but rather as a calling or a sending, mirroring Paul’s experience and displaying stylistic continuity in the way God engages with man.

The reason to expound on the notion of call rather than conversion is that language of conversion implies rejection of one faith for another, while calling emphasizes the view of Paul’s Damascus Road experience as a call to go to the Gentiles with a message of inclusion rather than a repudiation of Judaism. This language establishes that Paul did not reject the Jewish faith, nor does he call others to reject the Jewish faith in order to assimilate a new faith. Paul acts as apostle to the Gentiles, however contrary to common thought, this does not imply rejection or denouncement of the Jewish faith. Instead, Paul establishes that through Christ there is now opportunity for all, Jew and Gentile alike, to be made righteous before God. Gager explains that “In the end, there are not two peoples of God but one. Jews and Gentiles- humanity in its entirety- form one corporate body, not identical with Israel and certainly not with any Christian church. They are seen as common heirs... as the children of God.”⁹ Furthermore, Gager explains that Paul’s goal is not to reject Judaism in exchange for what is later coined Christianity, but instead that Paul remains thoroughly a “Jewish monotheist,” and that “it is clear that Paul thinks of the two ways as a temporary, provisional stage in the story of salvation.”¹⁰ Contrary to traditional views of Paul, it is evident that his mission was to invite Gentiles into the opportunity for righteousness before God through the finished work of Jesus Christ, and that he viewed this not as replacement or rejection of Jewish tradition but rather as a completion, an extension of this

⁹ Gager, *Reinventing*, 61

¹⁰ Gager, *Reinventing*, 60

promise. Paul was not creating a new way, but rather demonstrating the completed way, the sequential chapter, the New Covenant in this story of reconciliation between man and God. In order to accurately interpret the Pauline letters, it is crucial that his cultural context, pivotal life events, and defining personal and spiritual attributes be viewed accurately and uninhibited by traditional views of Paul that may be unfounded on factual evidence from scripture. A culturally and historically accurate depiction of Paul allows for a comprehensive understanding and correct interpretation of his writings. Proper understanding of Paul as one who was called rather than converted allows for sound interpretation of his writings. Paul wrote to the church of Galatia to urge them to accept the completed work and the faithfulness *of* Christ rather than to continue to strive to earn righteousness before God through works of the law. A translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ using a subjective genitive most aligns with Paul's efforts to free the Gentiles from the notion that righteousness is earned through works of man and instead remind them that the completed work and faithfulness *of* Christ is sufficient. The subjective genitive highlights Christ as the subject of faith, thus emphasizing the work of Christ rather than that of man. Hooker further clarifies this: "Faith is certainly not to be understood as a form of human works! Faith derives, *not* from the believer, but from the fact that he or she is already in Christ and identified with him... Those who exchange life under the Law for life in Christ exchange the righteousness which comes from the Law for the righteousness which belongs to those who are in Christ. The true antithesis is not between works and faith, but between works of the *Law* and the saving work of *Christ*."¹¹

¹¹Hooker, Morna D. "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ." *New Testament Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1989, pp. 321–342., doi:10.1017/S0028688500016817.

The Church in Galatia

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians between the late 40s to the mid-50s of the first century CE.¹² The church of Galatia was established by Paul, and the congregation consisted primarily, if not entirely, of Gentiles. “According to the book of Acts, he sometimes addressed himself to Gentiles in synagogues; at other times he must have found other venues, public and private, for conveying his message.”¹³ It is likely that Paul was successful while preaching to Gentiles either in the synagogues or in other public areas of Galatia, to which he responded by remaining in Galatia to solidify the founding of this church. It was common for Paul to “spend a period of time wherever he met with success, teaching and helping the newly found church to establish itself.”¹⁴ After the establishment of a church, Paul would leave that community in efforts to continue preaching and establishing new churches. However, as he advanced in his mission he maintained contact with previously established churches, either through visitations himself or communication through other friends and “co-workers.”¹⁵

Paul’s primary concern in the letter to the Galatians is to remind them of the original message through which they became a part of the people of God. Paul was advised that since his departure, the Galatian church had encountered other Jesus-followers that were instructing them to become circumcised and to follow the law, to convert to Judaism the way that was always available to non-Jews, in order to be made righteous before God. It is important to explore the cultural context of first century Galatia. America is a heavily individualistic culture, which drastically impacts societal norms, expectations, cultural realities, and the establishment of one’s

¹² Esler, *Galatians*, 1

¹³ Gager, *Reinventing*, 77

¹⁴ Gager, *Reinventing*, 77

¹⁵ Gager, *Reinventing*, 78

identity. Individualist cultures define people based on individual desires, passions, beliefs, goals, and other personal attributes. Individualism drives the way in which one makes decisions, defines oneself, and evaluates others. Similarly, collectivism drastically impacts and shapes the cultures to which it is attributed. Cultures that are structured upon collectivism define people based on the groups of which they are a part. For example, individuals within a collectivistic culture would be defined by their family, tribe, geographical location, the culture of which they are a part, their career, the community or neighborhood to which they belong, etc. People within collectivistic cultures might make decisions as a part of a group, with not their individual desires, goals, or other personal attributes as the driving force behind their decision making but rather the interests and goals of the group. The definitive qualities of a person within this culture are the circles to which they belong rather than their personal qualities and interests. Collectivist cultures can also often be defined as honor/shame cultures. This means that these cultures are driven by motivation to avoid shame and acquire honor. Conversely, America, an individualistic culture, could also be defined as a justice/injustice culture. Much of what motivates Americans is the idea of morality, what is right or wrong, just or unjust. The collectivistic, honor/shame culture present in Galatia largely, if not entirely, shaped the society and culture. “Given that individualism is only common in the post-industrial modern countries having a North Atlantic culture, we would naturally assume that the Mediterranean societies of the first century CE, which form the larger context of Galatians, were at least as collectivist as modern ones, but probably more so.”¹⁶ This collectivistic culture is evident in the way Paul addresses the Galatians, consistently identifying them as part of a group and encouraging them to remain firm in this identity. “Paul is concerned

¹⁶ Esler, *Galatians*, 47

with maintaining the distinctive identity of his congregations in relation to the Israelite and Gentile outgroups. Moreover, he wishes to defend their distinctiveness not so much by reminding them of the fact of their membership (the cognitive dimension) as by developing the evaluative dimension through drawing out the positive aspects of belonging to the ingroup which accepts his version of the gospel as compared with the negatively evaluated outgroups”¹⁷

Reading Paul’s letters through the lens of his respective cultural context, specifically the collectivistic nature of the Mediterranean culture, allows for proper interpretation. Paul wrote to the Galatians imploring them to remain firm in their new identity and to embrace this new “group” of which they were part. Gager describes Paul’s letter to the Galatians as a form of “damage control.” In Galatians 1:6-7 Paul claims: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The church of Galatia was turning from the original message they received as Gentiles, and they were beginning to believe that circumcision was necessary, as was Jewish tradition, in order to be officially and fully accepted as part of the covenant people of God. They were succumbing to pressure that came from other voices who disputed Paul’s vision of Gentile inclusion through Christ. Paul refers to this in Galatians 3:1-5:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God

¹⁷ Esler, *Galatians*, 42

supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

These “others” were preaching to the Galatians that their only path to inclusion is through the long-standing view that obedience to the law, including male circumcision, was their only option. Gager explains the difference between Paul’s gospel and this “other gospel” in saying, “Paul’s gospel, by contrast, held that Gentiles had been redeemed by Christ and that for them the law was no longer relevant; indeed, Gentiles had lain under a curse before Christ and had now been released from that curse.”¹⁸ Paul refers to opposition in Galatia, specifically people who are spreading this “other gospel.” David Aune describes Paul’s “opponents” as follows:

After Paul’s departure emissaries from the Jerusalem apostles (or the Antioch churches in conjunction with them) have arrived in Galatia to challenge Paul’s supposed “law - free gospel” with one that combines elements of Jewish tradition with belief in Jesus Christ. In some proposals, these emissaries are understood to misrepresent the position of one or another of the Jerusalem apostles, or to act to some degree independent of them (cf. Howard 1990). These emissaries are often tied to interest groups Paul is understood to oppose in his other letters, and usually deemed to be specifically engaged in an anti - Paul mission. They seek to persuade, even to compel, Paul’s Gentile converts to Christ to become proselytes (represented by the circumcision of males)... That is, they proclaim another gospel of Christ which includes circumcision and observance of certain Jewish laws.¹⁹

Scholars also suggest that the “opponents” could be Jewish followers of Jesus. Gager writes that they could be “like those whom the book of Acts calls the ‘circumcision party,’ and ‘believers from the Pharisees?’ Judging by the narrative... Paul seems to connect them to the ‘false brethren,’ the ‘men from James,’ and even to Peter, all of whom resisted his law-free gospel to the Gentiles.”²⁰

¹⁸ Gager, *Galatians*, 78

¹⁹ Aune, David E. *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010.p.460

²⁰ Gager, 79

Paul's primary purpose for writing this epistle to the Galatians is to remind them of the original message that he delivered to them, combatting the claims of these "others," and to remind the Galatian church that Christ has made them righteous apart from the law and they should not be lured into Torah obedience by the oppositional voices. The driving theme of this epistle to the Galatians is the topic of circumcision, which is the indelible mark of obedience to the law. This "other gospel" was law-driven and implored hearers to embrace circumcision as the only way to enter the covenant of God. Paul's gospel, on the other hand, argues for freedom from the law of circumcision for his Gentile audience.

The Church in Rome

Krister Stendahl describes that "it is of more than passing interest to note how this letter differs from that to the Galatians. There the discussion was about *Judaizers*, i.e. Gentiles infatuated with Jewish ways. In Romans, on the other hand, Paul speaks about Jews."²¹ Paul's epistle to the Romans was most likely written in the mid 50s, shortly after his Galatian epistle. Contrary to the circumstances in Galatia, Paul did not write to the church of Rome as its founder, or even as one who has previously visited the church. Paul wrote this epistle as someone who has heard of the believers in Rome and been encouraged by their faith. This is explained in the beginning of the letter in chapter one verse thirteen when he announces his intention to travel to Rome: "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented)." He describes in Romans 1:11-12 his previous efforts to visit these believers, his persistent prayer for them, and his devotion to visit them soon so that "I may

²¹ Stendahl, *Paul Among*, 3

share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” The identity of the founder of the Roman church is unclear, though it is speculated that it was founded by someone within Paul’s ministry.²² Paul’s letter to the Romans differs from his letter to the Galatians in that when addressing the Galatians he demonstrated frustration and criticism due to their doctrinal drifting, though in Romans 1:8 he shares that he is encouraged by their faith, and that he is thankful for the way their faith has been “proclaimed throughout the world.” Sumney describes the epistle to the Romans in this way: “the one that provides the fullest explication of what he teaches on a range of issues— including why people need the gospel and how God addresses that need in Christ.”²³

Romans was written after the letter to the Galatians, so although Paul had not previously met the church of Rome, it is possible that his letter to the Romans incorporated corrections to misperceptions of his Galatian letter that were prevalent within Rome. Gager explains that it is likely Romans was written to clarify Paul’s stance on issues such as Jewish law, the law in relation to Gentiles, and Jesus in relation to Israel, and misperceptions that could be the result of misreading his instructions to the Galatians.²⁴ Paul spent much of the Galatian letter arguing that Gentiles are to live free from the law, resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. He worked to correct the Galatians from drifting into submission to the law in order to receive justification. Paul’s writing implies that the Romans have over-compensated in the other direction, believing Paul to be one who is rejecting and renouncing Judaism and encouraging them to do the same, which likely resulted in the mistreatment of Jews by the Roman church. Paul appears to now be

²² *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, edited by Jerry L. Sumney, Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, p.3

²³ *Reading Paul's Letter*, 2

²⁴ Gager, *Reinventing*, 103

correcting the opposite extreme that is present in the Roman community, and it is likely that this misperception stemmed from his letter to the Galatian church. The letter to the community of Rome includes clarification that its members are to view Christ not as the rejection of Jewish Torah but as the completion of the promise and tradition of Judaism, and that through him they are now free from the law.

The mistreatment of Jews that Paul was addressing was also likely the aftermath of the Edict of Claudius, which was an order expelling the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D. Insook Han explains that “the expulsion of the Jews under Claudius played a significant role in developing the historical situation of Paul’s audience at the time he wrote Romans.”²⁵ Claudius issued this edict expelling all Jews from the city of Rome in an effort to “maintain stability and order within the Roman Empire,” because the Jesus movement was creating disturbances in the Jewish synagogues “severe enough to attract the attention of Claudius.”²⁶ It is likely the sense of superiority that Gentiles in Paul’s Roman audience felt over the Jews was fueled by this edict.

Furthermore, Paul is writing the epistle to the Romans to clarify that the Gentiles have no room to boast, and that they are not to treat the Jews with inferiority, because the righteousness they have received before God is not a result of their own doing, or superiority to the Jews, but rather of the work of Christ. Hays explains Paul’s primary intent for writing Romans 3:

In Romans 3, Paul’s fundamental concern is to assert the integrity of God. In the early part of this chapter, God’s faithfulness and righteousness/justice are called into question, at least for rhetorical purposes. After a crushing indictment of humanity’s injustice (vv.9-20), Paul sets forth his positive affirmation of the faithfulness and righteousness of God; God, he asserts, has now revealed his righteousness in a new way, overcoming human unfaithfulness by his own power and proving himself faithful and just. We

²⁵ Han, Insook. *Paul's Exhortation to Unity in Romans 14:1-15:13 and the Purpose of the Letter*, Dallas Theological Seminary, Ann Arbor, 2019. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2219301303?accountid=10639>.

²⁶ Han, *Paul's Exhortation*, 75

discover, furthermore, that this demonstration of God’s righteousness has something to do with Jesus, that this righteousness is manifested διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (3:22).²⁷

A subjective genitive translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ supplements Paul’s chief argument in this chapter that the opportunity for Gentiles to be made righteous before God is not one that they have earned, nor is it contingent on their actions, but that it is a demonstration of God’s righteousness and faithfulness despite the unfaithfulness and injustice of humanity. The translation “faithfulness *of* Christ” emphasizes the work of Jesus Christ rather than the actions of man as the path to righteousness.

Translating the Galatian Passage

Galatians 3:22 is the crux of the πίστις Χριστοῦ issue in this letter. The New Revised Standard Version reads: “But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” This version adopts the objective genitive, translating πίστις Χριστοῦ as “faith *in* Jesus Christ.” Other versions that share this translation include the New Living Translation, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and others, many of which were published between 1960 and the early 2000’s. It is common that newer translations adopt the objective genitive in their translation of this passage. The King James Version of Galatians 3:22, on the other hand, reads: “But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” This version utilizes the subjective genitive of πίστις Χριστοῦ, translating it as “faith *of* Jesus Christ.” Other versions sharing this translation include Young’s Literal Translation, Tyndale, Wycliffe, and others, primarily sharing publication dates that precede the former by hundreds of years.

²⁷ Hays, *The Faith*, 159

Hays states that it is linguistically feasible to translate this passage as an objective genitive, but argued that a contextual evaluation of Paul's statement does not support that translation. Prior to this verse in Galatians, Paul has been using the letter to formulate the argument that the Gentiles are justified before God not because of their behavior, or "works of the flesh" but rather because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. In Galatians chapters one and two Paul introduces himself (1:1), defends his credibility and character (1:11-12), provides a description of his persecution of early Jesus-followers (1:13), explains his vision and calling (1:15-16), his transformation (1:23), his ensuing encounters with leaders in Jerusalem (2:6), and finally his encounters and challenges in Antioch against Peter (2:11-14).²⁸ Gager raises the question of why Paul includes all of this information at the beginning of his letter, concluding that Paul is establishing that "his gospel came from a divine revelation and not from any human source."²⁹ In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul wrote: "For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul attempts to establish credibility by explaining his gospel was the product of divine revelation rather than human development. He creates this framework before describing his disagreements with opponents, namely Cephas, at Antioch, who were preaching a gospel contradictory to his own. This "false gospel" encouraged circumcision and obedience of the law as ways to earn justification. This other gospel was the message that the Galatian church was assimilating as their own; the message that the letter to the Galatians was meant to disqualify. These preceding

²⁸ Gager, *Reinventing*, 82

²⁹ Gager, *Reinventing*, 83

verses establish the intention behind Paul's letter, which was to remind the Galatians of the manner through which they are justified.

In chapter three Paul proceeds to emphasize that justification comes through faith rather than through the law, followed by a reference to Abraham as a clarifying parallel. The verbage Paul uses in Galatians 3:16-18 parallels Abraham and Jesus not as the objects of faith but as subjects of faithfulness. The promise of God was given to Abraham because of his faith, and Paul incorporates this relationship as a mirror of Jesus Christ's faith, and the promise that was made to Jesus in addition to Abraham.

The use of Abraham as a parallel supports a subjective genitive translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ because Abraham and Jesus are both presented as subjects of faith, which earns them the promise of justification before God. While this translation does not entirely negate human response, it is an example of Paul's belief that justification comes through the work of Jesus Christ rather than the behavior of man, such as through works of the law. Hays explains:

The phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ may be understood as a reference to the faithfulness of "the one man Jesus Christ" whose act of obedient self-giving on the cross became the means by which "the promise" of God was fulfilled. (This interpretation should not be understood to abolish or preclude human faith directed toward Christ, which is also an important component of Paul's thought.)³⁰

Galatians 2:16 supports this idea, and Hays argues that it could be paraphrased to mean "we placed our trust in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified on the basis of Christ's faithfulness."³¹ This verse depicts Christ as both the object and the subject of faith, more thoroughly delineating Paul's argument. However, πίστις Χριστοῦ specifically identifies Christ as the subject of faith, while the remaining context of this verse establishes that he is also the

³⁰ Hays, *The Faith*, 161

³¹ Hays, *The Faith*, 162

object of human faith. The subjective genitive translation of this phrase does not eliminate the implication that man is still responsible for responding to this gospel, for that would be contradictory to Paul's doctrine. Instead, it emphasizes the man is free from the necessity to behave in any way in order to earn justification, because it has been given through the finished work and faithfulness of Jesus Christ, and that the responsibility of man is to simply place their trust in this truth.

Furthermore, a translation utilizing the objective genitive creates redundancy in the text. The objective genitive translation of Galatians 3:22 reads "what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." The phrases "faith in" and "those who believe" create unnecessary redundancy because both indicate human initiative. Though it is not uncommon for Paul to be redundant, it would be peculiar that every instance of this phrase presents this trend. The phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is typically followed by phrases such as "to all who believe" and "to those who believe." Therefore, to translate πίστις Χριστοῦ as "faith in Christ" would create repetition of the necessity for human faith or belief. It is more likely that Paul intended the subjective genitive, implying that through the faith (or faithfulness) of Jesus Christ, all who believe may be justified.

Translating the Roman Passage

Analysis of Romans 3:21-22 is supplemental to the proper interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ. Similar to the Galatian letter, the phrase is translated using the objective genitive by the more modern versions of the Bible while the subjective genitive is adopted by older translations. Romans 3:21-22 in the NRSV reads: "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through

faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” The KJV, on the other hand, reads: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.” Again, the NRSV translates πίστις Χριστοῦ as “faith *in* Christ” while the KJV translates πίστις Χριστοῦ as “faith *of* Jesus Christ.” Similar to the Galatian passage, the objective genitive translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ creates unnecessary redundancy through the inclusion of both “faith in Christ” and “for all who believe.” This translation refers twice to the belief of man, whereas the subjective translation highlights first the faithfulness of Christ followed by the necessity of the belief of man. The subjective genitive provides continuity between this phrase and the remainder of Romans chapter three, pairing the faithfulness of Jesus with the belief of man to describe the path to gain righteousness before God.

Though Paul wrote to the Galatians to dispel their belief that they needed to practice Jewish tradition and law, he was addressing a converse issue in Rome, likely influenced by the Edict of Claudius. Paul wrote to the Romans to correct the rejection Jews were experiencing from Gentiles, claiming in Romans 2:10 that the Jewish tradition and people were not to be rejected and regarded as no longer part of the people of God, but rather as fellow people of God: “but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.” In Romans 3:1-2 Paul again affirms the value of the Jewish people: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.” Throughout the letter of Romans Paul is correcting an inaccurate understanding among Gentiles of how they relate to Jews and Jewish practices, confirming the perspective that Paul is not a Christian convert renouncing Judaism but rather an apostle with the goal of bringing Gentiles into the

covenant to receive righteousness alongside the Jews. The subjective genitive translation of Romans 3:22 supports Paul's gospel because it emphasizes the faithfulness of Jesus Christ that allowed for Gentiles to now have a path to righteousness. Paul's advocacy for both the Jews and Gentiles in his letter to the Romans is founded on the concept that the grace of God allows all to be justified. Paul's gospel emphasizes the work of Jesus Christ, but an objective genitive translation places the emphasis on human initiative twice. The subjective genitive, however, pairs the faithfulness of Jesus Christ with the belief of man, more accurately aligning with the rest of Paul's letter. Romans 3:23-26 says:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Gager explains that “In Galatians, Paul is defending his gospel against Judaizers within the Jesus-movement, not against Jews outside... If Paul argues against anything in Romans it is against the first signs of anti-Semitism among Jesus-worshippers, not against Judaism.”³² Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans to clarify that his gospel did not disqualify Jews as people of God, nor did his calling as apostle to the Gentiles indicate that he was repudiating or renouncing Judaism. Analysis of Romans 3:22 within its cultural and religious context supports the subjective genitive translation of the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, because this translation most aligns with Paul's gospel and with his purposes for writing this letter. Paul is addressing the Gentile mistreatment and misperception of the Jews and their place in Paul's gospel. In Romans 3:27-30

³² Gager, *Reinventing*, 45-46

he directly addresses their pride, describing that there is no room to boast because their justification is not a product of works:

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

An objective genitive translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ would work against Paul's message that there is no room to boast because this translation would emphasize the works of man rather than the faithfulness of Christ as the path to justification. The subjective genitive translation "faithfulness *of* Christ" supports Paul's attempts to reconcile Jew and Gentile relations because it eliminates any sense of superiority over Jews among Gentiles and emphasizes the work of Christ as the foundation for reconciliation.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate that a subjective genitive translation of the Pauline phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians 3:22 most aligns with the doctrine and mission of Paul. This translation provides continuity with his primary purpose for writing the epistle to the church of Galatia, and analysis of the same phrase in Romans 3:22 further affirms this translation. This perspective embraces a new view of Paul, and this paper has highlighted the components of Pauline writing that affirm the view of Paul as a Jew called to be apostle to the Gentiles rather than as a religious convert. The traditional view of Paul is thus challenged in efforts of pursuing a more accurate understanding of who he was and what his intentions were. A

proper perspective of the life and person of Paul allows for more accurate translation of his writings. Paul was calling Gentiles in Galatia away from their inclination to conform to Jewish law in order to earn righteousness before God, imploring them to see that it is not their actions, but that of God, that has made way for them to gain righteousness. The translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ as “faithfulness of Christ” provides the most continuity with his message, as it places the emphasis not on human initiative but on divine deliverance. Hays summarizes that though it is impossible to prove one translation as the intended meaning of Paul, this translation proves most satisfying:

The phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ may be understood as a reference to the faithfulness of “the one man Jesus Christ” whose act of obedient self-giving on the cross became the means by which “the promise” of God was fulfilled. (This interpretation should not be understood to abolish or preclude human faith directed toward Christ, which is also an important component of Paul’s thought.) In the nature of the case, it is not possible to prove this interpretation in such a way that all others are excluded, but the investigations set forth... have shown that in every case... “the faith of Jesus Christ” provides a better and more satisfying sense than the traditional translation of “faith in Jesus Christ.”³³

The soteriological implication of this translation is that the emphasis is placed on the finished work of Christ as the source of salvation rather than the work of man. The faith referred to in these passages is that of Christ, followed by the phrase “for all who believe.” This translation places proper focus on Christ as the founder and perfecter of our faith, and that the faith his people now have is because God is merciful in giving that to us:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ

³³ Hays, *The Faith*, 162

Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:23-29)

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

This translation does not negate the importance of Christian faith, but rather properly emphasizes Jesus Christ as the one whose faithfulness paved a way for all to enter into salvation. This understanding gives freedom to the Christian to not rely on their own works as the source of their righteousness before God but rather on the finished work of Jesus Christ, a freedom that Paul so earnestly desired for Jesus-followers. Again, Morna D. Hooker summarizes the implications of this argument well:

So were Luther and his followers wrong? They were certainly not wrong to emphasize the role of faith. And... it may well be that the answer to the question 'Does this phrase refer to Christ's faith or ours?' may be 'Both.' Nevertheless, that faith/faithfulness is primarily that of Christ, and we share in it only because we are in him... it would seem that [our faith in Christ] is possible only because it is a sharing in his. In Christ, and through him, we are able to share his trust and obedience, and so become what God called his people to be.³⁴

³⁴ Hooker, *Another Look*, 62

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