

Another look at πίστις Χριστοῦ

Morna D. Hooker

Robinson College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB3 9AN

mdh1000@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

The debate regarding the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ in the Pauline epistles continues and is important because of its implications for theology. In the phrase there is a double ambiguity, which touches not only the significance of the genitive, but also the meaning of πίστις. A brief look at some key texts in Romans suggests that the phrase refers primarily to the faith/faithfulness of Christ, but that this is also something shared by those who are 'in Christ'. Through Christ God has done what the law could not do, enabling men and women to become his children, and so share not only in Christ's faith but in what he is. The phrase thus represents the 'delicate balance between human behaviour and divine grace' that characterises Paul's soteriology.

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For Jan Lambrecht, on his 85th Birthday

On the last occasion that I tackled the problem of the meaning of the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, I argued that the question of its translation 'cannot be settled on the basis of appeals to grammatical construction alone. This issue can be settled only by exegesis'.¹ In support of this view I might well have appealed, though I did not, to J. H. Moulton, who, writing in his famous *Prolegomena* on the application of the labels 'subjective' and 'objective' to any genitive, commented that 'It is as well to remember that in Greek this question is entirely one of exegesis, not of grammar.'²

Since my original lecture was delivered, a great deal more has been written about the grammatical complexities surrounding the phrase, but – not surprisingly – we seem to be no nearer to any definite conclusion. The appeal to grammar has, in effect, run into the sand. Meanwhile, it is clear that the very different interpretations given to Paul's use of the phrase continue to be influenced by exegetes' very different presuppositions. In the words of

¹ Morna D. Hooker, 'Πίστις Χριστοῦ', *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), p. 321; reprinted in *From Adam to Christ* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 165–86.

² James Hope Moulton, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), p. 72.

one recent contributor to the discussion: 'It is theology, not grammar, that continues to drive the debate.'³

One thing is certain: this debate cannot be ignored. As recently as 1975, Charles Cranfield dismissed in a brief footnote the suggestion that πίστις Χριστοῦ should be understood as a subjective genitive,⁴ but by 1998 he felt obliged to spell out the reasons as to why he believed that the proposal was 'unconvincing'.⁵ One of the reasons that the debate has sparked interest and continues to excite some Pauline scholars – though most of them, it has to be said, are located on the other side of the Atlantic – is, indeed, its relevance to theology. 'The πίστις Χριστοῦ debate', it has been said, 'involves a conflict over the fundamental shape of Paul's theology'.⁶ It is no accident that Richard Hays, whose book *The Faith of Jesus Christ* was largely responsible for bringing the whole question to scholars' attention at the end of the twentieth century,⁷ titled a paper in which he defended his views, delivered to a meeting of the SBL in America in 1991, 'Πίστις and Pauline christology: what is at stake?'.⁸ In answer to his own question, he listed five issues: these concerned the relation between christology and soteriology in Pauline theology; the humanity of Jesus; the tension between individual religious experience and the corporate nature of salvation; ethics; and the significance of the phrase 'the righteousness of God'.

It is clear that the meaning we give to the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ influences the way we interpret the Pauline epistles. At the same time, however, our understanding of the epistles determines the way we interpret the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, since the stance we take on the issues that Hays lists as crucial influences our exegesis of the texts. We are locked firmly into the so-called hermeneutical circle.

³ Debbie Hunn, 'Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship', in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (eds), *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster/Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), p. 26.

⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, ICC Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), p. 203.

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, 'On the Πίστις Χριστοῦ Question', in *On Romans and Other New Testament Essays* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 81–97.

⁶ Benjamin Myters, 'From Faithfulness to Faith in the Theology of Karl Barth', in Bird and Sprinkle, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, p. 291.

⁷ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, SBL Dissertation Series 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

⁸ Published as an appendix to *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 272–97.

Presuppositions

It is relatively easy to expose the presuppositions of others, not always so easy to analyse our own. The Greek phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is ambiguous and can be translated either as ‘Christ’s faith’; or as ‘faith in him’ – though to English ears, at least, if we leave other considerations aside, the former seems more natural. The word πίστις itself is ambiguous, since it can mean not only ‘faith’, but ‘faithfulness’ – a meaning which seems to be common in the LXX. But ‘faith’ can also signify ‘what one believes’, and thus mean something closer to the English word ‘belief’, which normally conveys the notion of ‘belief that’, rather than ‘belief in’. And since English tends to have many synonyms, we can also translate πίστις by ‘trust’ or ‘trustworthiness’ – and the word ‘trust’ conveys well the notion of utter reliance on God – a reliance that is, of course, founded on the belief that he is trustworthy, and that he can be relied on to save his people. This problem of translation is not, of course, confined to English.

The ambiguity of the Greek was carried over into the Latin and other early versions of the New Testament. Was it perhaps because there appeared to the translators to be no problem in comprehending Paul’s meaning? But if there was in fact no problem, was that because the phrase was obviously objective, or because it was clearly subjective? Or was it perhaps because the distinction was meaningless, since the phrase could convey both meanings simultaneously? For all their definitions, the grammarians warn us against being over precise. ‘It is . . . important’, writes Nigel Turner, ‘not to sacrifice fullness of interpretation to an over precise analysis of syntax. There is no reason why a gen[itive] in the author’s mind may not have been both subjective and objective.’⁹

We might expect the comments of the fathers to help us here, but – alas! – their comments seem to be as ambiguous as Paul’s own writings, so it is hardly surprising if modern scholars interpret their evidence in diametrically opposite ways.¹⁰ In fact, there is remarkably little evidence as to how they understood the phrase: were they, too, unaware of any problem?

⁹ Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), p. 210. Cf. also F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Cambridge: CUP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §163.

¹⁰ Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, SNTSMS 84 (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), finds evidence that several of the fathers interpreted Paul as teaching that believers share the faith of Christ. Roy A. Harrisville III, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: Witness of the Fathers’, *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994), pp. 233–41, and Mark W. Elliott, ‘Πίστις Χριστοῦ in the Church Fathers and Beyond’, in Bird and Sprinkle, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, pp. 277–89, both argue the opposite.

Did the phrase appear to them to be transparently clear? Where they do offer clear comments, these tend to favour the view that they understood Paul to be thinking of the objective genitive.¹¹ Thus Athanasius, commenting on Hebrews 3:2, rejects the Arian interpretation of that verse by insisting that the word πιστόν here means that Christ was one who should be believed, and that it does not mean that he himself had faith. Since this concerns the interpretation of Hebrews, it does not, of course, preclude the notion that Paul might have referred to Christ's own trust or trustworthiness. Nevertheless, for Athanasius the real debate concerned the humanity and divinity of Christ, and the suggestion that Christ had faith in God implied that he was merely human. The author of Hebrews, then, must be speaking of Christ's trustworthiness, and not of his trust in God.¹²

Athanasius' doctrinal assumptions are clear, and dictate his exegesis of the text. Later, we find Augustine, commenting on Romans 3:22, insisting that Paul cannot mean 'the faith with which he himself believes', since faith is a quality of man,¹³ and later still we find Thomas Aquinas arguing, on the basis of Hebrews 11:1, that 'where divine reality is not hidden there is no point in faith. But from the moment of conception Christ had the full vision of the very being of God. . . . Therefore he could not have had faith.'¹⁴ For Athanasius, Augustine and Aquinas, then, their exegesis of the text is driven by their presuppositions regarding Christ's divinity and humanity. Undoubtedly their beliefs were based on their reading of the text, but it is clear that those same beliefs influenced the way in which they read the text. Their assumptions clash totally with the convictions of those modern scholars for whom 'Christ's faith' is seen not simply as a necessary part of his humanity, but as the distinctive mark of the one human being who was truly what man was intended by God to be.

The ambiguity in the Greek phrase is reflected in Erasmus' literal Latin translation and reappears in the first English translations of the New Testament. The King James Bible, following Tyndale, translated it literally as 'the faith of Christ'. In English, this would most naturally mean 'Christ's faith'. Was that how the translators understood it? It seems more likely that this is simply an example of their tendency to be overliteral in their translation. Certainly later English commentators, such as John Wesley in his

¹¹ R. Barry Matlock, 'Saving Faith: The Rhetoric and Semantics of πίστις in Paul', in Bird and Sprinkle, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, p. 87.

¹² Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* 2.6.9.

¹³ Augustine, *De spiritu et littera* 9 (CSEL 60, 167); *St Augustine: On the Spirit and the Letter*, trans. W. J. Sparrow Simpson (London: SPCK, 1925), §15.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3a, q.7, a.3.

Notes on the New Testament, understood the phrase to refer to our faith in Christ. But Wesley was, of course, like other English exegetes, strongly influenced by Martin Luther, and Luther was the first to make the 'objective' meaning abundantly clear by translating the phrase 'der Glaube an Jesum Christum'. Luther's doctrinal assumptions are here plain to see. Rightly observing that in all the contexts where the phrase is used, Paul is talking about Christians' belief in/faith in/trust in Christ, he read this same meaning into the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ. But was he right to do so?

Luther's understanding of the phrase dominated Protestant exegesis for the next four centuries: Paul's gospel was understood to be 'justification by faith', and πίστις Χριστοῦ was interpreted as meaning 'faith in Christ'. God had offered a means of reconciliation in the death of his Son, and all that was required of men and women was faith. When Paul uses the phrase ἐκ/διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, therefore, it is to emphasise the contrast between the righteousness imputed to men and women on the basis of faith and the pseudo-righteousness which relies on the works of the law. Catholic commentators, too, seem to have interpreted the phrase in a similar way, though their motives are less obvious; probably they were following tradition, or thought, like Aquinas, that it was inappropriate to attribute faith to Christ.

Challenges to the tradition

An interesting exception to the common view was expressed by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In a recent article J. Gerald Janzen has drawn attention to Coleridge's annotation on Christian writers, in which he refers to Christ's faith.¹⁵ Janzen describes him as a 'solid British antecedent' to his own views,¹⁶ since in commenting on saving faith Coleridge writes that 'even this Faith (see Gal. 2:20) is not ours but the Faith of the Son of God in us'.¹⁷ Perhaps because Coleridge was commenting on later Christian texts rather than the Pauline epistles themselves, however, I have not seen his interpretation referred to elsewhere.

It seems to have been Johannes Haussleiter who set in motion the modern movement that has challenged the traditional view. In 1891, he argued that when Paul wrote about πίστις Ἰησοῦ, he was referring to the faith which Jesus himself maintained in God, even in the face of crucifixion.¹⁸ Haussleiter

¹⁵ J. Gerald Janzen, 'Coleridge and Pistis Christou', *Expository Times* 107 (1996), pp. 265–8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁸ J. Haussleiter, *Der Glaube Jesu Christi und der christliche Glaube: Ein Beitrag zur Erklärung des Römerbriefes* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1891).

was followed, among others, by Gerhard Kittel,¹⁹ but an alternative solution was suggested by Adolf Deissmann, who proposed that the phrase represented ‘a special type of genitive, which might be called the “genitive of fellowship”, or the “mystical genitive”, because it indicates mystical fellowship with Christ’.²⁰ We may perhaps be concerned by Deissmann’s appeal here to ‘a special type of genitive’ – although grammarians do suggest far more options than the simple ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ genitives. What is worthy of note, however, is first that Deissmann is thinking in terms of fellowship with the spiritual Christ, and not of the faith of the earthly Jesus;²¹ secondly, that he approaches the problem with the conviction that, for Paul, faith is ‘faith “in” Christ, that is to say, faith is something which is accomplished in union of life with the spiritual Christ’.²² It is this conviction that determines his exegesis, and it is an idea that will be taken up by later commentators.

The notion that πίστις Χριστοῦ should be understood as a subjective genitive re-emerged in the English-speaking world in the 1950s. A. G. Hebert²³ and Thomas Torrance²⁴ both appealed to the equivalence between the Hebrew אֱמוּנָה and the Greek πίστις, and so interpreted πίστις Χριστοῦ as ‘the faithfulness of God manifested in Christ’s human faithfulness’. Torrance’s interpretation was built on that of Karl Barth, who had understood διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ to mean ‘through God’s faithfulness in Jesus Christ’.²⁵ But Hebert’s and Torrance’s arguments were demolished by James Barr, who attacked their assumption that πίστις would convey a fundamentally Hebrew meaning.²⁶ Others rejected their interpretation for different reasons. Professor Charlie Moule, my predecessor at Cambridge, for example, protested that it reduced Paul’s emphasis on human response to God’s action in Christ.²⁷ But one might with more justification protest that to understand πίστις Χριστοῦ as ‘our faith in Christ’ reduces emphasis on the action of God itself! If, for example, we translate Galatians 2:16 as ‘we know that a person is justified, not by the works of the law but by faith in

¹⁹ G. Kittel, ‘Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ bei Paulus’, TSK 79 (1906), pp. 419–36; NZK 2 (1891). (I have been unable to view this personally.)

²⁰ Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926; English trans. of 2nd German edn), pp. 162–3.

²¹ Contrast Kittel, ‘Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ’, 426.

²² Deissmann, *Paul*, p. 262.

²³ A. G. Hebert, ““Faithfulness” and “Faith””, *Theology* 58 (1955), pp. 373–9.

²⁴ T. F. Torrance, ‘One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith’, *Expository Times* 68 (1957), pp. 111–14.

²⁵ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. C. Hoskyns (Oxford: OUP, 1933), in loc.

²⁶ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1961), pp. 161–205.

²⁷ ‘The Biblical Conception of “Faith”’, *Expository Times* 68 (1957), p. 157.

Jesus Christ; and we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ', we have no fewer than three references to our faith in Christ, and none at all to what God has done! Is Moule's objection not a case of the tail wagging the dog – the doctrine of justification by faith determining the exegesis of the text?

One scholar who did advocate the meaning 'the faith of Christ' at length was Pierre Vallotton, whose book *Le Foi de Christ* seems to have made little impact on the scholarly world.²⁸ I was interested to discover that the copy of his book that I consulted in the Cambridge University Library had clearly once belonged to Charlie Moule, since the margins are full of indignant comments and protests in Charlie's own unmistakable hand.

At the end of the twentieth century, the centre of discussion moved to the United States, with scholars such as George Howard²⁹ and Luke Timothy Johnson³⁰ arguing for the subjective genitive, but it was Richard Hays who argued the case most forcibly in his doctoral dissertation,³¹ and who has been its champion ever since. His thesis as a whole dealt with 'The narrative substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11' and demonstrated the importance of interpreting the phrase in the context of Paul's argument, not in isolation. Hays's book led to a flurry of articles, and to the debate at the 1991 SBL meeting, at which Hays confronted J. Dunn, a staunch supporter of the traditional 'Lutheran' view. But that debate by no means settled the matter, and proponents of both views continue to argue their cases with vigour. The publication of a collection of seventeen new essays entitled *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* two years ago demonstrates the continuing interest in the topic.³²

A way forward?

Is there a way forward? If by that we mean 'Will everyone come to a common mind on this matter?' the answer must clearly be 'No'! Nevertheless, fashions in New Testament interpretation, as in everything else, do change, and it is certainly true that there is more sympathy with the so-called 'subjective' explanation than there was fifty years ago, when Charlie Moule was making his indignant annotations to Vallotton's book. Why? Is it simply due to the brilliance of arguments brought forward in its support – arguments that have

²⁸ P. Vallotton, *Le Christ et la foi: Etude de théologie biblique* (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 1961).

²⁹ George F. Howard, "The "Faith of Christ"", *Expository Times* 85 (1973), pp. 212–15; 'Faith of Christ, *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 758–60.

³⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, 'Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982), pp. 77–90.

³¹ See note 7 above.

³² See note 3 above.

persuaded many of its truth? But equally brilliant arguments have been made on the opposite side. Or is it perhaps because other changes have taken place? It seems to me that it is more likely to be due to the latter, and in particular to four changing emphases: (1) the stress on righteousness as belonging to God; (2) the realisation that much of Paul's argument concerns God's dealings with Israel and the Gentiles rather than the salvation of individuals; (3) the growing recognition of the importance for Paul of the idea of participation in Christ; and (4) the recognition that for Paul the humanity of Christ is essential both to his christology and to his soteriology.

In searching for a way forward, we should perhaps begin by analysing what we mean – or rather what Paul meant – by the word πίστις. According to Liddell and Scott, the primary meaning of the noun is 'trust in others' or 'faith', and so 'trustworthiness'; the second is 'that which gives confidence', hence 'assurance' or 'proof'. Arndt-Gingrich, on the other hand, list first 'that which causes trust and faith' – i.e. 'faithfulness', or 'proof' – and then the active sense of 'trust, confidence, faith in', the reason being, no doubt, that it is God's faithfulness that is seen as being of primary importance. When Paul uses the word πίστις of God, then it clearly indicates God's trustworthiness or faithfulness. If we ask 'to what is he faithful?' then the answer must be 'to himself' – i.e. to his own nature. But when the word is used of Christians, then the primary meaning of the word is 'faith' or 'trust'. In this sense, the word indicates a relationship: Christians have faith in God or in Christ. The lexica's different definitions reflect what is in fact a hen-and-egg situation. Our trust/faith is founded in the trustworthiness/fidelity of God, but those who trust in him become like him, trustworthy in their turn. Paul makes use of this idea in 2 Corinthians 1:15–22, where he appeals to the faithfulness of God in order to defend himself from accusations that he himself is untrustworthy.³³ Both as a member of God's holy people – no longer because he is a Jew, but because, like the Corinthians, he is 'in Christ' – and as an apostle (2 Cor. 1:1–2), Paul is called to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 11:45). It is no wonder, then, that he reflects the faithfulness of God himself.

The phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is thus doubly ambiguous. Not only are we confronted by a choice between the subjective and the objective genitive – or whatever other kind of label we decide to use – but, if we choose the subjective genitive, we again have two possible translations. Might Paul be speaking of the faith of Christ or of his faithfulness? The former emphasises his humanity – since as man, he trusted in God – while the latter can be understood as a sharing in the nature of God. But once again, this may be a

³³ Hooker, Πίστις Χριστοῦ, pp. 334–5, reprinted in *From Adam to Christ*, pp. 117–18.

false dichotomy, since the choice which confronts us may have been forced on us because of the problem of translating from one language to another. Could Paul perhaps be referring both to Christ's faith/trust in God and to his faithfulness/trustworthiness? If Christ was – as Paul claims – the one who was all that Adam was *not*, then we would expect him not only to trust completely in God, but also to reflect God's trustworthiness. For if, as Paul claims, Christ was 'the true Adam', then this was because he was 'the image of God', as he expresses it in 2 Corinthians 4:4, and thus reflected the glory – the nature – of God.

Paul's argument in Romans

The precise meaning of a phrase can be understood, however, only when we look at the context in which it is found. Richard Hays subtitled his book 'The narrative substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11'. Romans, too, has a narrative substructure, but the epistle is primarily an argument, and we need to trace it if we are to understand our phrase. The book's theme is 'the gospel (or good news) of God', good news which was announced beforehand in the scriptures, and which concerns God's Son, who was the physical descendant of David, but who was proclaimed Son of God in power by the resurrection of the dead (1:1–4). In what follows Paul sets out his understanding of this gospel, and how it is that it is intended for Gentiles as well as Jews, and in the rest of this paper I will look at how that argument may throw light on our problem.

Paul first sets out his own mission: it is to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles. Once again, we have a phrase that can be translated in many ways, and it has been suggested that the words 'faith' and 'obedience' are synonymous.³⁴ Certainly it seems that there is for Paul a close link between the two, and this corresponds with the Jewish conviction that God had called Israel to trust/have faith in him as their only God, and to obey his law – in other words, what E. P. Sanders famously described as 'covenantal nomism'. Paul's expression 'obedience of faith' neatly sums up this idea, but hints also at a contrast between an obedience that is grounded in faith, and one that is defined by the law. At the end of the letter, Paul again speaks of his work in winning obedience from the Gentiles,³⁵ thus framing the epistle with statements regarding his mission. Paul's mission includes the Christians in Rome, since they, too, are apparently Gentiles (1:6) – Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ, and therefore called also to

³⁴ See e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, I, pp. 66–7.

³⁵ Rom. 15:18. See also 16:26, which uses the phrase 'the obedience of faith', though the final three verses may be a later addition to the letter.

be saints (v. 7). This means that, like Israel of old, they have been called to be holy as God is holy, members of God's people – all this by virtue of the fact that they belong to Jesus Christ.

In 1:9 Paul refers once again to the fact that the gospel he preaches is about God's Son. This is the third time that Paul has spoken of Christ as God's Son, suggesting that it is a key term in his argument.

Romans 1:16–17 bring us another definition of the gospel. It is, we now learn, the power of God to bring salvation for all who believe – for the Jews first, and then Greeks – since in it, the righteousness of God is revealed. Others have pointed out that Paul's language here echoes that of Psalm 98, which speaks of God making known his salvation in the sight of the nations and revealing his righteousness to the house of Israel³⁶ – though according to Paul's gospel, salvation is no longer confined to the house of Israel. There seem to be clear echoes of the LXX in the words σωτηρία, δικαιοσύνη and ἀποκαλύπτεται. What has not been pointed out, however, is that the Psalmist goes on to say that God has remembered his steadfast love and his faithfulness to Israel; the LXX translates these terms with ἔλεος and ἀληθεία, mercy and truth, but the Hebrew uses דסן and ננמס. Is Paul remembering the Hebrew here? If so, this could perhaps explain why he goes on to say that God's righteousness is revealed ἐκ πίστεως, so giving him a link to Habakkuk 2:4. God has remembered his faithfulness, and the revelation of his δικαιοσύνη springs from his πίστις. As we read on through Romans, we find that God's faithfulness is one of Paul's themes: the gospel is the demonstration of God's faithfulness to his promises (1:2).

It would seem, then, that the phrase ἐκ πίστεως in Romans 1:17a refers to God's faithfulness. But who is it who makes the answering response of faith referred to in the phrase εἰς πίστιν? Is it Christ, or Christian believers? Or is it perhaps both? Paul helpfully explains his meaning by quoting Habakkuk 2:4, but succeeds only in leaving the commentators more confused. Because God reveals his δικαιοσύνη, springing from his own faithfulness, to those who have faith, 'the one who is righteous, on the basis of faith, will live'. But who is this righteous one? Once again, it could be either Christ or the Christian. And to whose faith (or faithfulness) does this use of the phrase ἐκ πίστεως refer? Since the Habakkuk quotation picks up the phrase that Paul has just used, we would expect him to be interpreting it – as the LXX certainly does – to mean God's faithfulness. If so, then the righteous one

³⁶ Most recently Douglas A. Campbell, 'An Echo of Scripture in Paul and its Implications', in J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb (eds), *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 367–91. The echo is noted already by NA²⁶.

lives because of God's faithfulness. Or does Paul understand it to refer to the faith/trust which the righteous one has in God? If so, then Paul could be thinking either of Christ or the Christian. But we have not yet finished with the possible permutations, since the phrase ἐκ πίστεως can be taken either with ὁ δίκαιος or with ζήσεται. Is Paul interpreting Habakkuk to mean that the one who is righteous by faith will live? Or that the one who is righteous will live by faith?

Once again, one wonders whether the variety of meanings is not a clue to the answer to our problem. Do we have to choose between them? First, does ἐκ πίστεως belong to ὁ δίκαιος or to ζήσεται? Later on, Paul spells out the fact that righteousness leads to life (Rom. 5:17, 21). Indeed, so close is the relationship between them that in v. 18 he uses the expression δικαίωσις ζωῆς. The unusual word δικαίωσις occurs elsewhere only in 4:25, where Christ's resurrection means that we are made righteous. Faith in the one who raised Jesus to life leads to our being-made-righteous (4:25), and now (5:18), our being made righteous leads to life – a life which, as Paul explains in Galatians 2:20, is lived by faith in Christ, i.e. by union with him. If the relationship between righteousness, faith and life is so close, is it possible that Paul is here deliberately leaving both possibilities open, and that the phrase ἐκ πίστεως can refer either to ὁ δίκαιος or to ζήσεται?³⁷

Secondly, if righteousness is revealed 'from faith to faith', as Paul claims in v. 17a, then the righteous one will certainly live because of God's faithfulness. But Paul is going to go on to show how, true to his promises, God 'rightwises' those who have faith. So their faith, too, is important! If we were to ask Paul, then, to whose faithfulness/faitth does the ἐκ πίστεως of Habakkuk 2:4 refer – that of God or of the believer – he might have well replied 'both'! And what of Christ? Do we not expect, in this summary of the Gospel, some reference to him? As we shall find when we turn to 3:21–6, God's righteousness was made plain through Christ. In 1:17b, then, is Paul perhaps thinking of Christ's faith/faitthfulness? And if so, is he then interpreting Habakkuk 2:4 as a messianic text, as some have claimed?³⁸ It is not modern exegetes alone who read texts in the light of their beliefs! Paul certainly did so, and he may well

³⁷ Francis Watson insists that we must choose between these two interpretations, and argues forcefully that the former is correct, on the basis that πίστις and δικαιο- words occur together frequently elsewhere. See 'By Faith (of Christ): An Exegetical Dilemma and its Scriptural Solution', in Bird and Sprinkle, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, pp. 147–63.

³⁸ See e.g. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 40–5; Douglas A. Campbell, 'Romans 1:17: A Crux Interpretum for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994), pp. 265–85.

have interpreted ‘the Righteous One’ as a messianic title.³⁹ Christ is referred to as ‘the Righteous One’ by Luke,⁴⁰ and Paul himself would certainly have thought of Christ as ‘righteous’, since he is the source of righteousness for others – an idea expressed vividly in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where he is described as ‘righteousness’, and in 2 Corinthians 5:23, where Paul tells the Corinthians that in Christ we become the righteousness of God. In Romans 3:10, Paul concludes his lengthy indictment of Jews and Gentiles with the statement that ‘there is none righteous, no, not one’, and in the subsequent contrast between Adam and Christ, it is through Adam’s disobedience that many are condemned, through Christ’s obedience that the ‘many’ are made righteous (5:19) and so find life (v. 21). Christ is the source of righteousness for the many.

How is this achieved? The answer lies in Paul’s important opening salvo to his argument in chapter 6: ‘Do you not know that you have been baptised into Christ’s death?’ His question is prompted by the ludicrous notion that Christians should sin in order to allow God to show them even more grace. For Paul, the idea is absurd, because Christians have died to one way of life and been raised to another – in Christ. Because he died to sin and lives to God, they too should be dead to sin and alive to God (vv. 10–14), since by dying and rising with Christ they are no longer ‘in Adam’ but ‘in Christ’. They must therefore now present themselves to God as instruments of righteousness. What this means is explained in v. 16: ‘Don’t you know that if you present yourselves to someone as slaves to obey him, you are slaves of the one whom you obey?’ The question seems tautologous, but it is clearly designed to emphasise the point. Paul now explains that one can either be a slave of sin – which leads to death – or of obedience – which leads to righteousness. This third use of obey/obedience is extraordinary. The choice we expect Paul to offer the Romans is between being slaves of sin or of righteousness – leading to life. Instead, the opposite of ‘sin’ is not righteousness, but obedience! Why? Once again, Paul’s purpose may be to emphasise his point, which is hammered home in the next verse: ‘You, who were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching delivered to you; having been freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.’ The following verses then draw the contrast we expect. Sin leads to death, but righteousness to life.

Four references to obedience in two verses can hardly be accidental. They appear to be picking up what Paul said in 5:19 about Christ’s obedience – the

³⁹ 1 Enoch 38:2; 53:6. The date of this section of 1 Enoch is notoriously difficult to establish.

⁴⁰ Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14. See also Jas. 5:16.

obedience that made many righteous. Now we realise that Christians share not only Christ's righteousness but also his obedience – or should do! Those who die and rise with him must present themselves to God as slaves of righteousness instead of sin – and that means being 'obedient to obedience'. To be in Christ means being obedient as he was obedient. We notice that the same link occurs in Philippians 2, where the famous Christ-passage in vv. 6–11, in which Paul reminds his readers how Christ was 'obedient to death', is followed in v. 12 by the words: 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed me . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you.' In obeying Paul, they are of course obeying Christ, since in Paul they have an example of what it means to live in conformity to the cross of Christ (3:17–18).

Paul's argument in Romans 5–6 uses the idea of obedience rather than faith, but it is clear that the language of 'obedience' and 'faith' overlap: both words express our relationship to God, and both lead to righteousness. Paul's emphasis on obedience here also picks up what he said in the opening verses of the epistle, where he defined his mission as being 'to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations'. This 'obedience of faith' was precisely what God had required of Israel, whom he had originally called to be his holy people, and what that entailed had been set out in the law. Now, however, it is those who are 'in Christ' who are obedient as Christ was obedient, and who present themselves to righteousness for sanctification as God's holy people. God's righteousness has been made manifest 'apart from law', to those who have been baptised into Christ and who belong to him. It is time to turn to 3:21–6, where the crucial phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ occurs.

Romans 3:21–6

The first thing to note is that 3:21 picks up the statement in 1:17 that the gospel concerns the revelation of God's δικαιοσύνη. The intervening verses have spelt out the failure of all, Jew and Greek alike, to worship and obey God. Israel has proved unfaithful, but God himself has remained faithful (3:2), and man's unrighteousness has served to demonstrate God's righteousness. No one is righteous (3:10), and the law has served only to make this plain. But now God's δικαιοσύνη has been made known *apart from law*, though both law and prophets bear witness to it – as Paul indeed affirmed in the letter's opening sentence. It has been made known, Paul now explains, διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστευοντας. The last few words clearly refer to Christians: it is they who trust/believe; but what does Paul mean by the phrase διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ? We expect Paul to tell us here how God's righteousness is revealed, and this phrase seems to provide the explanation. From the summary of the gospel in 1:2–4, and those still to

come in 4:24–5, and 5:6–11, the answer is plain: he has acted in Christ. This suggests that Paul is referring here to Christ's own πίστις, rather than that of believers. God's righteousness is revealed through Christ himself, not in our response to him. 'Pistis Christou', suggests Lou Martyn, 'arises in Paul's vocabulary as his way of reflecting the tradition's reference to Christ's deed of rectification'.⁴¹ And if we ask why he should use the phrase in this particular context, the answer must be because here, as in Galatians 2–3 and Philippians 3, his concern is to show how God's righteousness is revealed *apart from the law*, in Christ. The contrast between a righteousness based on the works of the law and one based on faith requires a reference to what God has done. And what the law was unable to do has been achieved through God sending his Son (8:3). We are saved, not by faith, but by grace through faith. That faith belongs primarily to Christ, but it can be shared by those who are 'in him'. That is why the righteousness given to those who are 'in Christ' (8:1) depends, as Habakkuk 2:4 and Genesis 15:6 (quoted in 4:3) make clear, on faith.

So if Paul is referring in 3:21–6 to Christ's πίστις, is it to his faith in God or to his faithfulness? Let us turn back once more to Romans 5:12–21. Here Paul does not simply compare Adam and Christ, but contrasts them, since the contest between Adam and Christ is not an equal one. In v. 15 he affirms that what took place in Christ was not like what happened in Adam, because in Christ we see the grace of God and the gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ. In v. 16 he repeats this: the gift cannot be compared with what happened through Adam, because the act of grace led to acquittal. And in v. 17 he says virtually the same thing! Paul's syntax is confused, but his meaning is plain: the result of one man's trespass was that death ruled because of that one man; how much more momentous, then, are the grace and the gift of righteousness which lead to life for those who receive them through the one man Jesus Christ. Three times over, Paul emphasises that what has happened concerns *the action of God, in and through Christ*.

In Romans 5:15–17, then, the one man Christ is pitched against the one man Adam, and it is essential for Paul's argument that Christ is fully human. But at the same time, he makes it abundantly clear that, to use the language of 2 Corinthians 5:19, God was at work in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. In being obedient, Christ was all that man should be, but at the same time God himself was clearly at work. It is no accident that immediately before the Adam/Christ passage in Romans 5:12–21, Paul reminds his readers that God's love to us is seen in the fact that Christ died for us. Having been 'justified' by his death, we can be confident that we will be saved through Christ from wrath; having been reconciled to God through the

⁴¹ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 270–1.

death of his Son, we can be confident that we will be saved by his life. The language points forward, of course, to that of chapter 6. It is not simply 'by' his death and resurrection that we are reconciled and saved but 'in' them, by sharing in his death and resurrection.

So is Christ's πίστις in 3:22 his faith in God or a sharing in the faithfulness of God? Romans 5 suggests that the answer may be 'both'. The logic of 3:22 requires us to suppose that here, too, Paul is thinking of God's action in Christ, and in v. 24 he spells out what this action is. 'God set forth Christ Jesus as a ἰλαστήριον – a mercy seat – through faith/faithfulness, by his death'. The phrase 'by his death' – ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι – will be picked up in 5:9. But what does the phrase διὰ πίστεως here mean? This time there is no reference to either Christ or to the believer, but I am inclined to agree with those who have argued that the strange order of words suggests that Paul must be thinking once again of the πίστις of Christ.⁴² Our redemption was achieved both through the action of God and through Christ's trust in him. The paragraph is rounded off with yet another use of the phrase, but this time it refers to 'the faith of Jesus' rather than that of Christ,⁴³ which suggests that Paul is referring here to his faith rather than ours.⁴⁴

Another echo of previous chapters is the reference in Romans 5:10 to Jesus as 'God's Son'. Paul does not use this term often, but when he does, it seems to be important. We have noted already that it occurs three times in the first nine verses of the epistle. It will recur again five times in chapter 8. And here, in 5:10, we find it in what is essentially a summary of the gospel – a summary that reminds us of why Christ was uniquely qualified to be the one who dealt with the aftermath of Adam's sin. To describe someone as 'the son of so-and-so' was to argue that he had the characteristics of so-and-so. To be a true son meant not only to be obedient to one's father, but to be fully in accord with one's father's will and purposes. Such a son would trust his father and prove trustworthy.

For Paul, the gospel or 'good news' concerns God's Son, who was son of David according to the flesh, and was declared to be Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead (1:3–4). In 5:10 he spells out what this good news means for us: if we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son when we were enemies, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. And in 8:3–4 he explains its significance in relation to the law: what the law could not do,

⁴² E.g. Johnson, 'Romans 3:21–26', pp. 79–80.

⁴³ A few MSS and versions read Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, but the evidence for this reading is very weak.

⁴⁴ Cf. Johnson, 'Romans 3:21–26', p. 80.

because of the weakness of the flesh, God has done; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he has condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live according to the spirit, and not according to the flesh. As Jan Lambrecht has argued, Paul's declaration that the requirement of the law is fulfilled in us picks up his indignant denial in 3:31 of the suggestion that in maintaining that God's righteousness has been revealed apart from law, διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, he was overthrowing the law. Professor Lambrecht has suggested further that in 8:4 'Paul delicately balanced two aspects of obedience, i.e., human behavior and divine grace'.⁴⁵ This delicate balance between human behaviour and divine grace is precisely what, we have argued, is present in what Paul says about Christ, both in Romans 5:12–21, and in the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, which conveys divine faithfulness as well as faith. But in 8:4, instead of being seen in Christ, this balance is reflected in those who are 'in Christ'. God sent his Son in our likeness, sharing our flesh; but he defeated sin, and enabled us to live according to the Spirit – the Spirit that raised him from the dead. And so, as Paul goes on to explain, we become children of God, using the very name for God used by Jesus himself (vv. 14–17). We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, sharing his glory (vv. 29, 31), because God gave up his own Son for us (v. 32). Those who are conformed to his image will certainly share his obedience and his faith. It is no accident that every occurrence of the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is found in a context which speaks of the faith of Christians, for through death and resurrection his faith becomes theirs.

God has revealed his righteousness in Christ, who became what we are – yet without sin – and so enabled us to become what he is. This theme permeates Paul's letters, and illumines the passages where the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is used. In Galatians 4:4–5, he tells us that God sent his Son, born of a woman, under the law, in order that we might be set free from the law and become God's sons. For Paul, this means that he himself has died to the law, and that Christ now lives in him, since he lives because of the πίστις Χριστοῦ (2:20); it is not through the law, but through the faith of Christ, in whom we have put our trust, that we are set right with God (2:16). The promise given on the basis of faith is fulfilled for those who are 'in Christ' and so Abraham's seed (3:6–18).

In Philippians 2:8, Paul tells us that Christ took our human form and was obedient even to death – and his subsequent vindication and exaltation mean that those who live in him live in hope of sharing his resurrection and being

⁴⁵ Jan Lambrecht and Richard W. Thompson, *Justification by Faith: The Implications of Romans 3:27–31* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), p. 70.

conformed to his glory (Phil. 3:11, 21). Why? Because those who are ‘in Christ’ share the righteousness that comes through his πίστις (Phil. 3:9). The close links between Philippians 2:6–11 and chapter 3 suggest that Paul is thinking here of Jesus’ obedient trust in God.⁴⁶ In Romans, the obedience of God’s Son leads him to share our death, and his subsequent vindication means that those who are ‘in him’ share his resurrection and life (Rom. 4:25; 5:12–21). In him, they are called to obedience, and their destiny is to be conformed to the likeness of God’s Son, and so to become God’s children (8:29), for they have been ‘called to belong to Jesus Christ . . . called to be saints’, called to offer ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1:5–7). And all this happens because God has revealed his righteousness through Christ’s πίστις (3:21–6).

In this paper I have had time only to begin the exploration of the relevance of the notion of Christ’s πίστις to Paul’s argument in Romans. Nevertheless I have, I hope, succeeded in showing why interpreting the phrase to refer primarily to Christ’s trust in God fits so well into Paul’s conviction that in the one man Jesus Christ, men and women are enabled to become what he is. But, of course, this inevitably demonstrates how a particular interpretation of Paul’s thought governs our exegesis of the text.

So were Luther and his followers wrong? They were certainly not wrong to emphasise the role of faith. And as with the answers to our questions about the other phrases we have briefly considered, 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. Although all the passages where the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ is used refer to our faith in Christ, it would seem that this faith 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.

⁴⁶ I explored these links in ‘Philippians 2.6–11’, in E. Earle Ellis und Erich Grässer (eds), *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für W.G. Kümmel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 151–64, reprinted in Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, pp. 88–100.