

Short Study

Πίστις in Galatians 5.5–6: Neglected Evidence for ‘Faith in Christ’

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Scholars rarely appeal to Gal 5.5–6 in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. However, two points show the relevance of these verses to the discussion: (1) in 5.1–6 Paul picks up the contrast between πίστις and νόμος he developed in chs. 2–3 so that πίστις in 5.5–6 is equivalent to πίστις Χριστοῦ in the earlier chapters, and (2) πίστις in vv. 5–6 is human faith because it works through human love. Gal 5.5–6 therefore supports the position that πίστις Χριστοῦ is an objective genitive meaning faith in Christ.

Keywords: faith, Galatians, love, objective genitive, πίστις Χριστοῦ, subjective genitive

Exegetes have generally overlooked Gal 5.5–6 in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate for obvious reasons: neither verse uses the expression, and the two verses come more than a chapter after its last appearance in 3.22. The passage has recently played a minor role in efforts to reinforce the subjective genitive position,¹ a role first articulated by Hung-Sik Choi and then taken up by Douglas Campbell and Martinus C. de Boer.² Choi’s contention, however, that πίστις in vv. 5–6 shares a common meaning with the πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases in chs. 2–3 remains largely ignored. But the importance of this point should not be missed: if Paul’s use of πίστις in chs. 2–3 is consistent, at least in terms of the one who exercises it, and if its use in 5.5–6 reflects that in chs. 2–3, then determining the use of πίστις in 5.5–6 resolves the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate in Galatians. The aim

1 Πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive would refer to Christ’s faith or faithfulness, but as an objective genitive to faith in Christ.

2 H.-S. Choi, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6: Neglected Evidence for the Faithfulness of Christ’, *JBL* 124 (2005) 467–90; D. A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009) 886–92; M. C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011) 315–19. Most proponents of πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive do not tie πίστις in 5.5–6 to πίστις Χριστοῦ in 2.16 or 3.22 (Choi, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 470 n. 17).

of this study is to offer evidence that ἐκ πίστεως in v. 5 is an abbreviation of the πίστις Χριστοῦ phrases in 2.16 and 3.22, that ἀγάπη in 5.6, 13 demonstrates that πίστις in vv. 5–6 refers to human faith, and therefore that πίστις in vv. 5–6 strengthens the objective genitive position that πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians means faith in Christ.

1. Πίστις in 5.5–6 as πίστις Χριστοῦ

Although many scholars do not connect πίστις Χριστοῦ with unmodified occurrences of πίστις even within chs. 2–3, Paul's sustained argument requires that his uses of πίστις in 2.16–3.26 be equivalent and that he employ πίστις in 5.5–6 as he does in ch. 3.³

The parallel between 3.14b and 22b illustrates the correspondence between a simple πίστις phrase and πίστις Χριστοῦ in ch. 3. Verse 22b, at the beginning of the renewed contrast between faith(fulness) and law (πίστις and νόμος), repeats the idea of v. 14b that the promise comes by πίστις. Verse 14b says, 'in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through πίστις' (ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως) and v. 22b, 'in order that the promise from πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ might be given to those who believe' (ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). Both ἵνα-clauses begin with ἐπαγγελία; both relate πίστις to ἐπαγγελία; v. 22b includes Χριστός, which is assumed in v. 14b from v. 14a; and the point of both is that ἡ ἐπαγγελία is received (λάβωμεν, v. 14b) or given (δοθῇ, v. 22b) by πίστις. Paul, in other words, returns in v. 22 to the contrast he made earlier between πίστις and νόμος without changing the referent of πίστις. Therefore, v. 22b replaces διὰ τῆς πίστεως of v. 14b with ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, thereby equating πίστις Χριστοῦ in v. 22 with an unmodified use of πίστις in v. 14. Choi supplies another instance of the shorter πίστις phrase substituting for the longer when he asserts that ἐκ πίστεως in v. 24 points back to ἐκ πίστεως

3 For a list of scholars in the subjective genitive camp who understand some occurrences of πίστις in Gal 3 to refer to human faith, see my article 'Pistis Christou in Galatians: The Connection to Habakkuk 2:4', *TynBul* 63 (2012) 75–91, at 76–7 n. 4. Richard Hays, however, has long appreciated the need for a similar interpretation of several uses of πίστις in Gal 2–3, and Douglas Campbell observes that ἐκ πίστεως and διὰ πίστεως are indistinguishable in the context (R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002²) 166, 173; Campbell, *The Deliverance of God*, 378). Dieter Kremendahl assumes without argument that the two phrases have the same meaning (*Die Botschaft der Form: Zum Verhältnis von antiker Epistolographie und Rhetorik im Galaterbrief* (NTOA 46; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 190).

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in v. 22.⁴ The conjunction ‘so that’ (ὥστε) in v. 24 validates this position since it implies that v. 24 summarises the preceding argument. Thus two simple πίστις phrases in ch. 3 are clearly equivalent to πίστις Χριστοῦ in v. 22.

A general consistency in meaning among the πίστις phrases from 2.16 to 3.26 derives from the focus on justification in the passage and the contrast between πίστις and νόμος throughout it.⁵ Paul begins in 2.16–21 by recounting his conversation with Peter about the justification of Jews by πίστις rather than νόμος. These two elements remain the subject of the letter as it unfolds: in 3.1–5 the Galatians receive the Spirit by πίστις, not νόμος; in vv. 6–14 justification is by πίστις, not νόμος; in vv. 15–18 νόμος does not replace the promise (which is received by πίστις according to v. 14); and in vv. 19–25 νόμος works for justification by πίστις. Paul’s sustained argument does not allow πίστις in 2.16–3.26 to oscillate between an anthropological and a Christological sense. James Dunn goes so far as to say that Paul’s argument would lose coherence if he uses πίστις to mean Christ’s faithfulness at one point and human faith at another in the same context without clearly signalling the change.⁶ But does the same caution apply to ἐκ πίστεως in 5.5? This use of πίστις occurs more than a chapter after the previous one.

Despite the distance between them, there is a line of thought connecting the contrast between νόμος and πίστις in 3.22–6 to the same contrast in 5.1–6. In 3.24–9 Paul declares both the Jewish and the Gentile Christians to be sons of God in Christ through πίστις now that νόμος has lost its role as disciplinarian for the Jews. He adds in v. 29 that the sons of God in v. 26 are heirs of the promise, and he continues the theme of heirship in 4.1–7 by noting that the state of the Jews under νόμος was like that of an heir as a child—virtual slavery. The Gentiles, too, had been slaves, but to idols (v. 8). Paul then rebukes the Galatians in vv. 9–20 for aspiring to return to slavery in the form of submission to the Mosaic Law (νόμος in v. 21); and in vv. 21–31 he associates slavery and νόμος with Hagar, but freedom with Sarah. Chapter 4 contains three occurrences of νόμος, (vv. 4, 5, 21), but drops all reference to πίστις. Nevertheless, the men and women whom Paul calls sons of God through πίστις in 3.24–9 are the heirs and free people he speaks of in ch. 4, so that πίστις is still the indirect subject of that chapter.

In 5.1–4 Paul appeals to his readers to stand fast in their freedom in Christ because circumcision would enslave them to νόμος. Then by telling them in

4 Choi, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 467 n. 2. In the same note Choi adds that in Romans Paul abbreviates διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (3.22) to διὰ πίστεως (3.25, 31) and ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ (3.26) to ἐκ πίστεως (3.30).

5 See Hunn, ‘Pistis Christou in Galatians’, 80–5 for some details.

6 J. D. G. Dunn, ‘ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ: A Key to the Meaning of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’, *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays* (ed. J. R. Wagner, C. K. Rowe, A. K. Grieb; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008) 351–66, at 357.

v. 5 that ‘we’ wait for the hope of righteousness ἐκ πίστεως, he explicitly reintroduces the contrast between πίστις and νόμος last seen in 3.22–6.⁷ The lack of change in the use of πίστις is evident in that the hope of righteousness being ἐκ πίστεως in 5.5 is clearly related to the promise being ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ in 3.22.⁸ Therefore, the contrast between πίστις and νόμος in 3.22–6 and 5.1–6 and the continuity of Paul’s argument from 3.22 to 5.6 argue that πίστις in 5.5 retains the same referent it had in ch. 3. Paul picks up πίστις in ch. 5 as if his original readers know what he is talking about.

2. Πίστις in 5.5–6 as Human Faith

Since the πίστις of one individual is unlikely to work through the ἀγάπη of another, the same person will demonstrate both πίστις and ἀγάπη in the phrase πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη in v. 6. Therefore most commentators understand πίστις in vv. 5–6 to speak of human faith in Christ because they understand ἀγάπη to speak of human love.⁹

Campbell and de Boer, however, disagree. Campbell does not regard πίστις in 5.5–6 to be equivalent to πίστις Χριστοῦ in chs. 2–3; yet he argues that it corroborates that πίστις Χριστοῦ is a subjective genitive, but without proving it definitively.¹⁰ In particular, he maintains that πίστις in 5.5–6 cannot mean faith in Christ, but describes ‘faithful Christians in Christ’.¹¹ To make his case, Campbell takes up the idea of πίστις as power from Choi and argues from a participationist perspective.¹² Because he understands ἐνεργουμένη in v. 6 as a middle to say that πίστις is ‘putting itself into effect’ by means of love and because love makes the focus of Paul’s language ethical, Campbell interprets πίστις as an ethical force.¹³ In his view, then, vv. 5–6 say that people who wait

7 De Boer points out in addition that Paul had already used ἐκ πίστεως in 3.7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 24, as he does in 5.5 (*Galatians*, 317). See also Choi, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 471.

8 The promise is the Abrahamic promise, which includes justification (3.6–9, 18, 22). It is not the objective of this article to solve the problem of whether the righteousness in 5.5 refers to justification at conversion, as in 3.22, or to its goal of perfection in the eschaton. Gal 3.1–5 says that both beginning in the Spirit and ‘ending’ (ἐπιτελέω in v. 3) are done by πίστις.

9 E.g. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971¹⁴) 234; F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief: Auslegung* (HTKNT 9; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1988⁹) 350; R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word Books, 1990) 228–9; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 472.

10 Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 1163 n. 137.

11 Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 886–8.

12 Choi argues for πίστις in 5.5–6 as power based on the two verbs, ἰσχύει and ἐνεργουμένη (translated ‘counts’ and ‘working’, resp., NRSV), in v. 6 (‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 482–3).

13 Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 887–8. Furthermore, de Boer cites Jas 5.16; Acts 19.16, 20; Rev 12.8 to say that ἰσχύει in Gal 5.6 means ‘to be strong, to have power’ (*Galatians*, 318 n. 449).

according to the exhortation in v. 5 are participating in Christ and in the faithful journey he took. Such participation, being enabled by the Spirit, makes the ethical capacities of the participants effective so that ‘Christ’s story figures forth in their lives in terms of love’ (v. 6).¹⁴ But Campbell argues against πίστις as human faith in Christ in vv. 5–6 because in the judicial view of justification, human faith has no power to put itself into effect through love. It has no more ethical power than circumcision or uncircumcision.¹⁵

Campbell correctly observes that human faith in Christ is not an ethical power. However, although a human hand lacks the capacity to light up a dark room, it can press a button or flip a switch to connect to a power that does. Like the participationist view, a retributive forensic view of justification also acknowledges the involvement of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. In this view, when Paul’s readers believed in Christ as Paul first preached to them, they received the Spirit (3.1–5) and thereby received the power Campbell acknowledges as the source of ethical behaviour.¹⁶ The power of human faith cannot carry a believer to a higher ethical plane, but the Christ that faith grasps can. Paul explicitly speaks of human response in ch. 5: ‘standing’ in the freedom Christ won for people in v. 1 is a human response, and ‘waiting’ in v. 5 is a human disposition of faith. The faith of waiting is one of placing one’s hope in the work Christ accomplished, so both human faith and Christ’s work are meaningful elements in vv. 1–6. However, if πίστις in vv. 5–6 is equivalent to πίστις Χριστοῦ in chs. 2–3 as argued above and if it describes the Galatians as Campbell affirms, then it does not depict their faithfulness, but their faith in Christ, according to the anthropological sense of πίστις Χριστοῦ.

De Boer, on the other hand, follows Choi in understanding love in v. 6, and therefore πίστις in vv. 5–6, as Christ’s. Both scholars note that 2.20 speaks of Christ’s love and conclude that the Galatians would be inclined to identify love in 5.6 as his because 2.20 is the sole prior reference to love in the letter.¹⁷ According to de Boer, Paul thus defines ‘Christ’s faith in terms of his self-giving death’ in 5.6.¹⁸ Against this, however, in v. 13 Paul returns to the topic of freedom that he began in v. 1 and urges the Galatians to exercise their freedom by serving one another in love. To support the righteousness of such an appeal, he cites the command in the law to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ in v. 14. Verse 13 therefore speaks about human love. Most scholars see v. 13 picking up

14 Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 890–1, quotation on p. 890.

15 Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 887.

16 Note, too, that by receiving the Spirit, the Galatians were then also ‘in Christ’ as the parallel in vv. 5–6 between waiting ‘in the Spirit’ in v. 5 and being ‘in Christ’ in v. 6 shows.

17 Choi, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 486; de Boer, *Galatians*, 318.

18 de Boer, *Galatians*, 318–19. Similarly, Choi’s thesis is that ‘πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη [in 5.6] refers to Christ’s faithfulness working powerfully through his self-giving love to humanity on the cross’ (ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5–6’, 482).

ἀγάπη from v. 6 so that human love is the subject of both verses.¹⁹ Choi does not deal with v. 13, but de Boer reads ἀγάπη in v. 13 as the ‘human correlate’ of Christ’s love in v. 6.²⁰ Thus he connects ἀγάπη in vv. 6 and 13 yet without equating them. But if ἀγάπη in v. 6 is Christ’s and ἀγάπη in v. 13 is its human counterpart, why does Paul focus on how human love fulfils the law rather than how it is like Christ’s? If the point is that the Christian’s love imitates Christ’s, its relationship to the law would appear to be irrelevant.

Furthermore, vv. 6 and 13 share more than the general context of freedom (vv. 1, 13), righteousness (vv. 5, 14) and slavery (δουλεία in v. 1, δουλόω in v. 13) in common. Walt Russell observes that v. 13 takes the assertions of v. 6 and states them more forcefully. Because it is a command, the directive to the Galatians in v. 13b not to use their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh is stronger than the statement in v. 6a that in Christ fleshly states mean nothing.²¹ In addition, taking an opportunity for the flesh in v. 13b is more general than the specific fleshly act of being circumcised. Russell also compares the positive statements introduced by ἀλλά in the same two verses. Verse 6b says that πίστις working δι’ ἀγάπης is what matters in Christ, and v. 13c gives the injunction to serve one another διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης.²² Again, the positive command of v. 13, by virtue of being a command, is more forceful than the related statement in v. 6.

Therefore, the emphatic call to freedom in v. 13 indicates that Paul has returned to his topic in vv. 1–6; and the close conceptual ties between vv. 6 and 13 affirm that ἀγάπη in v. 6, like that in v. 13, is human love. Consequently, the πίστις that works through the love in v. 6 is human faith.

3. Conclusion

The equivalence between πίστις in 5.5–6 and πίστις Χριστοῦ in chs. 2–3 allows exegetes to mine ch. 5 for a solution to the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate.

19 E.g. A. L. Mulka, ‘Fides quae per caritatem operatur (Gal 5:6)’, *CBQ* 28 (1966) 174–88, at 175; Schlier, *Galater*, 244; Mussner, *Galaterbrief*, 369; K. Kertelge, ‘Freiheitsbotschaft und Liebesgebot im Galaterbrief’, *Neues Testament und Ethik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989) 326–37, at 328; F. J. Matera, *Galatians* (SP 9; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 183; J. D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; London: A. C. Black, 1993) 288; B. O. Ukwuegbu, ‘Paraenesis, Identity-Defining Norms, or Both? Galatians 5:13–6:10 in the Light of Social Identity Theory’, *CBQ* 70 (2008) 538–59, at 550.

20 de Boer, *Galatians*, 319.

21 W. Russell, ‘The Apostle Paul’s Redemptive-Historical Argumentation in Galatians 5:13–26’, *WTJ* 57 (1995) 333–57, at 338–9. Don Garlington adds: ‘If, according to v. 6, faith works “through love”, then v. 13 clarifies specifically what Paul means’ (D. B. Garlington, *An Exposition of Galatians: A Reading from the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007³) 258).

22 Russell, ‘Redemptive-Historical Argumentation’, 338–9.

Verses 13-14 expand upon ἀγάπη, which πίστις works through in v. 6, so that ἀγάπη – and thus the πίστις working through it – are undeniably human. Scholars therefore who have not accepted previous exegetical arguments that πίστις Χριστοῦ is an objective genitive in Gal 2-3 may yet be persuaded by the simple argument from love in 5.6.