

Short Study

Δικαιωθῆναι διὰ τῆς ἐκ Χριστοῦ πίστεως: Notes on a Neglected Greek Construction¹

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In the debate concerning the faithfulness of Christ one finds, correctly, reference to three types of Greek constructions. First is πίστις Χριστοῦ, the very subject of the debate. As most agree, its ambiguity calls the exegete to search for arguments beyond mere syntax in order to establish the nuance of the phrase.² Second are examples of πίστις with αὐτῶν, ἡμῶν, ὑμῶν or σου.³ Typically these are not up for debate, being cited to demonstrate the extensive use of the subjective genitive with πίστις.⁴ Third, one finds reference to πιστεύω/πίστις with preposition (ἐν, εἰς, πρὸς, or ἐπί). For the sake of this

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2 '[B]oth the substantive meaning of πίστις and the force of the genitive are ambiguous', according to Greer Taylor, 'The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ in Galatians', *JBL* 85 (1966) 58–76 (71). See also Sigve Tonstad, 'Πίστις Χριστοῦ: Reading Paul in a New Paradigm', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 40 (2002) 37–59 (45); Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 277–8. Exceptions include Arland J. Hultgren, who claims that the subjective genitive is excluded on the basis of syntax alone ('The Pistis Christou Formulation in Paul', *NT* 22 [1980] 248–63). Similarly Gerhard Kittel concludes regarding πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Romans that 'die Übersetzung "Glaube Jesu Christi" nicht nur zulässt, sondern geradezu fordert' ('Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ bei Paulus', *Theologischen Studien und Kritiken* 79 [1906] 419–36 [426]).

3 E.g. Matt 9.2; Mark 2.5; Luke 5.20; 8.25; Rom 1.8; 4.5; 1 Cor 2.5; 15.17; Phil 2.17; Col 1.4; 1 Thess 1.8; 2 Thess 1.3; Phlm 6.

4 George Howard, 'Notes and Observations on the "Faith of Christ"', *HTR* 60 (1967) 459–65 (459); Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995) 69.

discussion these present no real difficulty, being taken as explicit if not virtually synonymous.⁵

Our contribution entails bringing into discussion another construction, going beyond Paul to the whole NT. The construction appears in two forms. An example of the first is Acts 24.24: ὁ Φῆλιξ ... μετεπέμψατο τὸν Παῦλον καὶ ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν πίστεως. Here the object of πίστις is clarified, not by an objective genitive, but by an adjectival prepositional phrase in the attributive position (AAPP).⁶ Similar is the redundant Col 2.5: ...βλέπων ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν. The εἰς-phrase unambiguously clarifies the object of the verbal noun πίστις.⁷ Various forms of this construction are common in early Christianity.⁸

The second form is the converse of the first, appearing in Acts 23.21, though without πίστις. While in Roman custody, the son of Paul's sister learns of a group plotting his demise. Hoping to protect the apostle from the scheme, the young man informs the centurion, saying: σὺ οὖν μὴ πεισθῆς αὐτοῖς: ἐνεδρεύουσιν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἄνδρες πλείους τεσσεράκοντα, οἵτινες ἀνεθεμάτισαν ἑαυτοὺς μήτε φογεῖν μήτε πιεῖν ἕως οὗ ἀνέλωσιν αὐτόν, καὶ νῦν εἰσὶν ἕτοιμοι προσδεχόμενοι τὴν ἀπὸ σοῦ ἐπαγγελίαν. Our concern is the AAPP ἀπὸ σοῦ, which clarifies the subject or source of the verbal noun ἐπαγγελία. Further, this type of AAPP can appear as ἐκ θεοῦ, as figures in Phil

5 For Williams they diverge. God is the object of πίστις for Paul, while Christ is the object of πιστεύω. To believe in (πιστεύειν εἰς) Christ is to confess truths of the gospel (Sam K. Williams, 'Again Pistis Christou', *CBQ* 49 [1987] 431-47 [442-3]). Contrast the more nuanced discussion of K. F. Ulrichs (*Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma πίστις Χριστοῦ and zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007] 13-28).

6 This is the most likely force for the uncommon πίστις εἰς + person (Acts 20.21; 26.18; Col 2.5; 1 Pet 1.21) even if, as asserted by C. K. Barrett, Luke's πίστις does not have typical Pauline content (*Acts 15-28* [London: T. & T. Clark, 1998] 1114).

7 As is done elsewhere with πρὸς. So, at *Abr.* 1.268, Philo refers to faith in God (ἡ πρὸς θεὸν πίστις) as the only good (cf. *Mut.* 1.201; *Praem.* 1.27; *Her.* 1.94; *Somn.* 1.68); cf. *4 Macc.* 15.24: because of her faith in God (διὰ τὴν πρὸς θεὸν πίστιν); Josephus *AJ* 19.289: some Jews worthy of favor because of their faithfulness to the Romans (διὰ τὴν πρὸς Ῥωμαίους πίστιν). Πρὸς marks the object with other verbal nouns as well. E.g. Acts 13.32: the promise made to our ancestors (τὴν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἐπαγγελίαν γενομένην); 22.1: the defense I make to you (ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς νυνὶ ἀπολογίας); 26.6: the promise given to our ancestors (τῆς εἰς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν ἐπαγγελίας γενομένης); 1 Pet 1.10: the prophets who spoke of the grace given to you (προφήται οἱ περὶ τῆς εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος προφητεύσαντες).

8 E.g. Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 4.21.134.31: ἡ εἰς χριστὸν πίστις; Justin Martyr *Fragmenta operum deperditorum* 11.6: τῆς εἰς χριστὸν πίστεως; Irenaeus *Fragmenta operum deperditorum* 25.3: τὴν εἰς χριστὸν πίστιν; Athanasius *Contra gentes* 1.17: τὴν εἰς χριστὸν πίστιν; Origen *Cels. Prooemium* 6.6-7: τῆς εἰς χριστὸν πίστεως; cf. 1 Clem 22.1: ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ πίστις.

3.9: τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει. Such ‘righteousness has God as its source’.⁹ NT examples of such adjectival phrases with ἐκ/ἀπὸ/παρὰ + person are rare.¹⁰ Outside the NT, one can cite numerous examples of which the following are merely representative.¹¹

Jeremiah 11.20 (LXX)

In light of evil schemes planned against him, the prophet cries: ‘Lord, you are the one who judges rightly and who tests hearts and minds. May I see your vengeance against them’ (ἴδοιμι τὴν παρὰ σοῦ ἐκδίκησιν ἐξ αὐτῶν).¹² Παρὰ marks σοῦ, that is κυρίου, as subject.

Prayer of Manasseh 11:

The writer laments having more sins than the sand of the sea (v. 9) and being weighed down by God’s wrath (v. 10). Then comes the statement, ‘Now I bend the knee of my heart asking for your kindness’ (καὶ νῦν κλίνω γόνυ καρδίας δεόμενος τῆς παρὰ σοῦ χρηστότητος). Παρὰ marks σοῦ, that is θεοῦ, as subject.

Josephus

AJ 7.147: After David took Bathsheba as a wife, God appeared to the prophet Nathan and faulted the king (ἐμέμφετο τὸν βασιλέα). But since

- 9 Veronica Koperski, ‘The Meaning of *Pistis Christou* in Philippians 3:9’, *Louvain Studies* 18 (1993) 198–216 (214), followed by Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 237–9; likewise Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 397.
- 10 E.g. Mark 5.30: Jesus knew power went from him (τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξελοῦσαν); Mark 7.20: what comes out of a person defiles (τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενον, ἐκεῖνο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον); Rom 11.27: my covenant (ἡ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη); 2 Cor 8.7: our love which is among you (τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη); cf Mark 9.10: what is resurrection from the dead (τί ἐστὶν τὸ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστήναι); Rom 10.6: righteousness from faith speaks this way (ἡ δὲ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη οὕτως λέγει).
- 11 Included could be Wis 9.6: the wisdom that comes from you (τῆς ἀπὸ σοῦ σοφίας ἀπούσης); Thuc. 2.92.6.1: fearing help given by Athenians (φοβούμενοι τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων βοήθειαν); cf 4.8.5.1, 4.105.1.1; Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.33: rather consider yourselves ignorant of the necessities of God (ἀντὶ δὲ τῶν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀναγκαίων ἀγνωμονεῖν δόξητε); Plut. *Agesilaus* 4.1: relatives from his mother’s side (τοὺς ἀπὸ μητρὸς οἰκείους). Examples of non-person adjectival prepositional phrases are numerous. E.g., Plut. *Sulla* 5.1: glory gained in battle (τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πολεμικῶν δόξαν); Xen *Hell* 5.4.58.5: blood poured from the body (ἐρρῦη τὸ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος αἷμα). Rarely the AAPP can designate both source and object. Thus Cyrus was delighted when he saw the fear that the Greeks caused in the barbarians (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.18: Κύρος δὲ ἤσθη τὸν ἐκ Ἑλλήνων εἰς τοὺς βαρβάρους φόβον ἰδών).
- 12 All translations are the author’s own. With Jer 11.20 compare the nearly identical Jer 20.12, containing τὴν παρὰ σοῦ ἐκδίκησιν ἐν αὐτοῖς. In both cases τὴν παρὰ σοῦ ἐκδίκησιν translates תַּמְנִי.

Nathan was astute, he kept God's threats (τὰς μὲν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγενημένας ἀπειλάς) to himself and decided to come to David with a pleasant message. Here παρὰ θεοῦ may designate source or it may be the virtual equivalent of ὑπὸ θεοῦ, marking θεός as subject.¹³

AJ 10.16: The king of Assyria writes a threatening letter to Hezekiah, saying it is foolish to think Israel will escape Assyria's power. According to Josephus, Hezekiah is not intimidated, and despised the letter 'because of God-given confidence' (ταῦτ' ἀναγνοὺς καταφρονεῖ διὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πεποιθήσιν). Source is marked by ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ.

AJ 10.277: Josephus holds the view that, long before the events, Daniel predicted the suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes and Israel's desolation by Rome. Those who read (τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας) the prophecies will be amazed by how God honored Daniel (θαυμάζειν ἐπὶ τῇ παρὰ θεοῦ τιμῇ τὸν Δανιήλον). Παρὰ marks θεοῦ as subject of the verbal noun τιμή, which takes τὸν Δανιήλον as its direct object.

Philo

Virt. 1.46: The Hebrews, with few or no casualties, have defeated armies far greater than theirs. Such events are proof of God fighting together with them (πίστις δὲ τῆς ἐκ θεοῦ συμμαχίας).¹⁴ Source is marked by ἐκ θεοῦ.

Flacc. 170: At times Flaccus would see the beauty of the night sky and cry out, 'King of gods and men! You are not indifferent to the nation of the Jews, nor do they falsely tell of your providence' (οὐδ' ἐπιψεύδονται τὴν ἐκ σοῦ πρόνοιαν).¹⁵ Although Philo makes frequent use of προνοία, only here does it figure with an AAPP, the preposition ἐκ clearly marking θεοῦ as subject (cf. *Mos.* 1.67).¹⁶

Legatio ad Gaium 1.88: Here we find the rhetorical question: 'Certainly Asia and Europe can hold the gifts which you have given, can't they?' (Ἀσία καὶ

13 A similar case could be made for the preposition marking the subject in *AJ* 2.164: rejoicing in how things have worked out in the sovereignty of God (χαίροντες οὖν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐκ θεοῦ γεγενημένοις); 7.152: the immediate death of the child she bore to you (τεθνήξεσθαι δὲ καὶ τὸν παῖδά σοι παραχρῆμα τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς γεγενημένον); 11.145: Ezra urged them to cast out foreign wives and the children they bore (ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτάς καὶ τὰ ἐξ αὐτῶν γεγενημένα); cf. 11.152; *JW* 1.463.

14 Cf. *Thuc.* 1.89.2.6: having allies from the Peloponnese (ἔχων τοὺς ἀπὸ Πελοποννήσου συμμαχοῦς); *Jos JW* 6.286: to wait on help from God (προσμένειν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ βοήθειαν); *AJ* 8.117: your [God's] help given to all men in common (ἀλλὰ πᾶσι κοινήν τὴν ἀπὸ σοῦ βοήθειαν).

15 For Josephus, προνοία as divine providence is distinguished from προνοία as forethought. The former is ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ προνοία (*AJ* 2.349; 3.99; 4.60; 6.159; 13.80; 20.49, 168).

16 At *Legatio ad Gaium* 1.146 likewise ἐκ clearly marks the subject: Augustus ended wars that came about because of attacks by bandits (διὰ τὰς ἐκ ληστών ἐπιθέσεις).

Εὐρόπη τὰς ἐκ σοῦ γεγεννημένας δωρεὰς οὐ χωρεῖ).¹⁷ Similar to *AJ* 7.147, ἐκ σοῦ may designate source or it may be the virtual equivalent of ὑπὸ σοῦ, marking σοῦ as subject/agent. Certainly it is well established in NT usage that both ἐκ and ἀπό can be used causally or instrumentally with the passive.¹⁸

Mostly importantly, although they are rare, forms of ἡ ἐκ τινος πίστις can be found. According to Polybius 23.7.1.4, when returning to Macedonia Demetrius claimed that the Romans had shown him much favor and trust (οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι πᾶσαν τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν χάριν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν Δημήτριον ἀπηρείδοντο). Very similar is 23.10.5.1, where, in preparations for war with Rome, Philip expelled from cities all politically powerful families, replacing them with Thracians and barbarians whose loyalty to him would be more reliable in times of crisis (ὡς βεβαιοτέρας αὐτῷ τῆς ἐκ τούτων πίστεως ὑπαρξούσης κατὰ τὰς περιστάσεις).¹⁹

As these examples demonstrate, the AAPP is good Greek, being found in a variety of sources. Certainly the AAPP has its own ambiguities. Since only two examples of ἡ ἐκ τινος πίστις have been found, we cannot make a compelling case that ἐκ always marks the subject. With other verbal nouns ἐκ, ἀπό, or παρὰ can mark the subject; at other times it clarifies the source.²⁰ Nevertheless, in all cases the genitive as object is clearly excluded. Furthermore, a variety of sources shows that ἐκ/ἀπὸ/παρὰ θεοῦ is an acceptable modifier. Presumably, ἐκ/ἀπὸ/παρὰ Χριστοῦ would also be acceptable. But in Paul's extensive discussions of δικαιοσύνη, πίστις, and Χριστός there is one construction he neglects to supply: the unambiguously non-objective ἡ ἐκ/ἀπὸ/παρὰ Χριστοῦ πίστις.

This is, admittedly, an argument from silence. Nevertheless, since this debate is so well-traveled, others make arguments from silence asking why Paul did not

17 Cf. *Virt.* 1.122: freedom given by birth (τῆς ἐκ γένους ἐλευθερίας); *Mos* 2.252: God's unconquerable help (τὴν ἀήττητον ἐκ θεοῦ βοήθειαν).

18 C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 73–4. Moule cites, amongst others, Luke 7.35; 22.45; Acts 4.36; 15.4. See also Jas 1.13 (μηδεὶς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι) where in 8, 429, 630, 1505 and 1611 ὑπὸ is substituted for ἀπό. Ἄπό designates the agent in the AAPP of Jude 23: the garment dirtied by the flesh (τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶνα).

19 Similar constructions include Philo *Joseph* 1.127: without proofs given by me (ἄνευ τῶν παρ' ἐμοῦ πίστεων); Diodorus Siculus 19.42.5.4: the trust that had been given by the kings (τὴν δεδομένην ὑπὸ τῶν βασιλέων πίστιν); 19.86.2.2: the trust that had been given by Antigonus and Demetrius (τὴν δεδομένην ὑπ' Ἀντιγόνου καὶ Δημητρίου πίστιν); Josephus *JW* 2.21: Ptolemy seemed to be important because of the trust Herod placed in him (Πτολεμαῖον ῥοπήν εἶναι δοκοῦντα διὰ τὴν παρὰ Ἡρώδη πίστιν). When Philip followed the advice of Aratus, he guarded his loyalty to the Messenians (διεφύλαξε τὴν πρὸς Μεσσηνίους πίστιν, Polybius 7.14.2); but when he followed the advice of Demetrius, he lost the loyalty of the other Greeks (τὴν παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἑλλησιν ἀπέβαλε πίστιν, 7.14.6).

20 At other times the expression is partitive. E.g. Job 10.7 (LXX): who can rescue [someone] from your hands? (τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν σου ἐξαιρούμενος;).

use πίστις followed by Χριστῷ or by εἰς Χριστόν if he wanted to speak of faith in Christ or why he did not use πιστεύω with Jesus as subject if he wanted to speak of Christ's belief/faithfulness.²¹ These are reasonable questions, as is this: If, in Gal 2.16 for instance, Paul had wanted to speak, not of faith in Christ, but rather of Christ's faithfulness, why did he not say καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστόν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν διὰ τῆς ἐκ Χριστοῦ πίστεως?²² Such wording would spark debate as to whether ἐκ Χριστοῦ indicates the subject of πίστις or its source, but Christ as object of πίστις in Gal 2.16 would be excluded from consideration.

21 The former is asked by Wallis (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 70), the latter by Ulrichs (*Christusglaube*, 47 n. 263).

22 Or perhaps even δικαιωθῶμεν διὰ τῆς ἐκ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὸν ἴδιον πατέρα πίστεως (cf. τέλειος δ', οἶμαι, καθαρισμὸς ἢ διὰ νόμου καὶ προφητῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πίστις in Clement *Strom* 4.25.159).