

DOES ΠΙΣΤΙΣ MEAN ‘FAITH(FULNESS)’ IN PAUL?

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Summary

This article argues that ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ are two distinct meanings of πίστις in Paul. Many Pauline scholars write as if πίστις means ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time, using glosses like ‘faith(fulness)’ and ‘faith/faithfulness’. But I argue that a distinction between the active meaning of πίστις (faith) and its passive meaning (faithfulness) is evident in Paul. The main pieces of evidence supporting this distinction are contexts in which Paul uses πίστις interchangeably or in parallel with the verb πιστεύω and contexts in which Paul uses πίστις with an object of faith indicated by a prepositional phrase. I conclude that Pauline scholars should not use the gloss ‘faith(fulness)’ for the word πίστις.

1. Introduction

Does πίστις mean both ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ *at the same time* in Paul? Translating πίστις with ‘faith(fulness)’ or ‘faith/faithfulness’ has been common in the debate over πίστις Χριστοῦ. However, as I will demonstrate in this article, the lexical evidence for translating πίστις with both ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time is questionable. After surveying the use of ‘faith(fulness)’ as a gloss for πίστις in Pauline scholarship and defining the distinction between the active meaning of πίστις (faith) and its passive meanings (faithfulness), I will argue that a distinction between these two meanings of πίστις is evident in Paul. In other words, my answer to the question posed in the title of this article is essentially ‘no’.

1.1 'Faith(fulness)' as a Gloss of Πίστις in Pauline Scholarship

It is common today for Pauline scholars to speak as if πίστις means both 'faith' and 'faithfulness' at the same time in Paul, especially for those who interpret the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ as a reference to Christ's own faith or faithfulness (the subjective genitive view).¹ Most of these scholars simply assume the word can have both meanings at once, but occasionally some have argued explicitly for this view. For example, Robinson suggests that

there may have been a real distinction between *pistis* = 'belief' and *pistis* = 'fidelity', and in this event only the usage in a particular context could convey *even to a Greek* which sense was meant. But the other possibility is that, where we think we see a distinction through applying a test based on our own language and its distinctions, none existed for the native user of *pistis*. In this event, *pistis* did not convey to Paul either precisely what we mean by 'faith' or precisely what we mean by 'fidelity', but something else, a *tertium quid*, some notion, say of fixity or firmness, which was suitable for use in a variety of contexts, but which did not, as a constant semantic marker, require any differentiation in significance.²

Hays makes a similar argument in the context of his debate with Dunn over the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ:

Dunn's whole argument depends on making a clear distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness'. I challenge him, however, to show that it was semantically possible in Hellenistic Greek to make such a conceptual distinction. The single word πίστις carries both connotations. Therefore, Dunn's distinction is anachronistic, a semantic fallacy.³

And Downing has now argued that we should not attempt to disambiguate different connotations of πίστις in Paul, because ancient authors were for the most part not concerned with distinguishing the senses of words. Rather, we should embrace the 'semantic richness' of πίστις and its cognate terms.⁴

¹ The alternative is to interpret πίστις Χριστοῦ as a reference to faith *in Christ* (the objective genitive view). Variations of this debated phrase occur in Gal. 2:16 [2×]; Gal. 2:20; Gal. 3:22; Rom. 3:22, 26; Phil. 3:9; and Eph. 3:12.

² D. W. B. Robinson, "'Faith of Jesus Christ" — a New Testament Debate', *RTR* 29 (1970), 76. Robinson goes on to defend the idea that there is no difference between the two meanings in 1 Thess. and other contexts in Paul.

³ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3.1–4.11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 295.

⁴ F. Gerald Downing, 'Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith', *NTS* 56 (2010), 139–62.

More often, Pauline scholars simply use glosses like 'faith(fulness)' and 'faith/faithfulness' or speak in other ways that assume πίστις means both 'faith' and 'faithfulness' at the same time. Some apparently use these glosses to indicate the range of possible translations for πίστις, for they make a distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' in their actual arguments.⁵ But most assume that πίστις has both meanings at the same time in Paul. For example, Hays uses the gloss 'faith(fulness)' several times in his classic argument for the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ.⁶ And he speaks of Jesus's 'faith' interchangeably with his 'faithfulness' — for example, he sees διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ in Ephesians 3:12, as a reference to 'Christ's faithful execution of God's eternal purpose'⁷ and subsequently refers to this as 'Jesus' faith'.⁸ Hooker similarly speaks of Christ's 'faith/faithfulness' in her article on πίστις Χριστοῦ.⁹ Dunnill speaks of the 'faithfulness of Christ' interchangeably with his 'trust'.¹⁰ And Wright sometimes speaks in the same way in his recent two-volume work on Paul. He typically just transliterates *pistis* to refer either to God or the Messiah's faithfulness or the badge of covenant membership for the people of God. But when he defines *pistis* he tends to speak as if it can mean

⁵ E.g., Choi uses the gloss in his conclusion that ἐκ πίστεως in Gal. 5:5 probably means 'by the faith(fulness) (of Christ)' (Hung-Sik Choi, 'ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5-6: Neglected Evidence for the Faithfulness of Christ', *JBL* 124 [2005], 481). But it is clear in his argument that he means 'faithfulness of Christ' and not 'faith of Christ', for he makes a clear distinction between the two meanings and says 'I will use "the faithfulness of Christ", instead of "the faith of Christ"' (Choi, 'ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5-6', 471n20). Lindsay also uses the gloss 'faith(fulness)' but seems to distinguish between the two meanings in his actual argument (Dennis R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament* [New York: Brill, 1993], 98).

⁶ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 140, 151, 152, 161, 203.

⁷ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 150.

⁸ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 151. Hays also suggests that the phrase οἱ ἐκ πίστεως may primarily refer to Christ's faith but also include 'those who believe' as part of Paul's meaning (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 172).

⁹ Morna D. Hooker, 'ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ', *NTS* 35 (1989), 339–40. Campbell uses the similar gloss 'faith/fulness' in his translation of Rom. 1:17: 'The eschatological saving righteousness of God is being revealed in the gospel by means of faithfulness (namely, the faithfulness of Christ), with the goal of faith/fulness (in the Christian)' (Douglas A. Campbell, 'Romans 1:17: A *Crux Interpretum* for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate', *JBL* 113 [1994], 281).

¹⁰ 'It is the faithfulness of Christ which effects salvation — his trust in God as displayed in active obedience leading to his death and to the unfolding of new life in the resurrection' (John Dunnill, 'Saved by Whose Faith? The Function of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Pauline Theology', *Colloquium* 30.1 [May 1998], 5).

‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time: Israel’s Messiah ‘created a people marked out by their *pistis*, their own gospel-generated faith or faithfulness’.¹¹ It is possible that he is allowing for two different translations when he says ‘faith or faithfulness’. But the following quote seems to indicate that he does not see a clear distinction between the two: ‘this “faith” [the badge worn by the Messiah’s community according to Galatians] is for Paul much closer to the Messiah’s ‘faithfulness’ to the divine Israel-purpose than the split between “faith” and “faithfulness” in western theology (and modern English usage) would indicate’.¹²

Some scholars even suggest that πίστις can, *at the same time*, refer to both Jesus’s faithfulness and the Christian’s faith. For example, Williams briefly suggests that τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ in Romans 3:26 could refer to both the faith of believers and Jesus’s faith (even though he typically distinguishes the two).¹³ Hays allows that in Galatians 3:7 the phrase οἱ ἐκ πίστεως may secondarily refer to the faith of the believer even though it primarily refers to the faith(fulness) of Christ.¹⁴ His line of thinking is spelled out in a later comment: ‘Because the Christian’s life is a re-enactment of the pattern of faithfulness revealed in Jesus, it is futile to ask, in a formulation such as ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν ([Gal.] 3:24) *whose* faith is meant. It is of course “the faith of Jesus Christ”, but it is also the faith of the Christian.’¹⁵ Hooker is probably strongest on this point when she concludes that πίστις Χριστοῦ refers to both Christ’s faith/faithfulness and ‘the answering faith of believers, who claim that faith as their own’.¹⁶

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013): 1471.

¹² Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 968.

¹³ Sam K. Williams, ‘Again *Pistis Christou*’, *CBQ* 49 (1987), 445-46. Williams typically sees Paul using πιστεύω and πίστις to refer to the believer’s faith and πίστις Χριστοῦ to refer to Jesus’ faith (‘Again *Pistis Christou*’, 444, 447).

¹⁴ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 172.

¹⁵ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 203. Longenecker follows Hays in being open to the possibility that the faith of believers may be included in the meaning of πίστις in Gal. 3:23 (Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 103-4).

¹⁶ Hooker, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’, 341. Downs follows Hooker’s reasoning and applies it to 2 Tim. 3:15 (David J. Downs, ‘Faith[fulness] in Christ Jesus in 2 Timothy 3:15’, *JBL* 131 [2012], 144-45) as does Morgan in her recent massive study of *pistis* and *fides* (Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* [Oxford: OUP, 2015], 271n39).

In response to this way of speaking, a few scholars have argued that the real semantic fallacy is made by those who *fail* to distinguish between the two meanings of the word. In an earlier generation T. F. Torrance argued that the πίστις Χριστοῦ construction in Paul refers to both the faithfulness of Christ and the faithful and believing response of people.¹⁷ But James Barr responded that it was more likely that these are 'two *alternative* meanings' of the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ.¹⁸ And in the modern debate over πίστις Χριστοῦ, Matlock has criticized Hays for failing to make this semantic distinction,¹⁹ noting that Dunn rightly perceives that there are two meanings of the word.²⁰

Is it correct that there is no clear distinction between πίστις as 'faithfulness' and πίστις as 'faith' in Paul? Or are modern scholars failing to see the distinction between two meanings of πίστις? In what follows, I will argue that Paul distinguishes between these two meanings of πίστις in his letters. But first I must define the two meanings more carefully.

1.2 The Distinction between Πίστις as 'Faithfulness' and Πίστις as 'Faith'

Greek lexicographers have generally recognized a distinction between πίστις meaning 'faithfulness' and πίστις meaning 'faith'. BDAG lists three definitions of πίστις in the New Testament: 1) 'that which evokes trust and faith', 2) 'state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted, *trust, confidence, faith*', and 3) 'that which is believed, *body of faith/belief/teaching*'.²¹ The first two definitions correspond

¹⁷ T. F. Torrance, 'One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith', *ExpT* 68 (1957), 113.

¹⁸ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: OUP, 1961), 204. Barr's larger concern was Torrance's suggestion that Paul is using the 'Hebrew meaning' of 'faithfulness' rather than the 'Greek meaning' of 'faith' (Barr, *Semantics*, 201-5; cf. Torrance, 'Faith', 113).

¹⁹ R. Barry Matlock, 'Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective', *NovT* 42 (2000), 5-6.

²⁰ R. Barry Matlock, "'Even the Demons Believe": Paul and πίστις Χριστοῦ', *CBQ* (2002), 316.

²¹ 'πίστις', in Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker. (BDAG) 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Danker's English revision follows the original German of Bauer's lexicon (Walter Bauer, 'πίστις', *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*). Cf. Santos's Spanish dictionary of the Greek Bible: his first definition for πίστις is 'confidence in another' (*confianza en otro*) and his second gloss is 'behaviour which leads another to have confidence' (*comportamiento que lleva a otro a tener*

with the glosses ‘faithfulness’ and ‘faith’, while the third — the content of faith (*fides quae creditur*) — is outside the realm of my research question. The first definition includes a few unique usages in the New Testament like an ‘oath’ or a ‘pledge’.²² But for the most part it typically refers to ‘the state of being someone in whom confidence can be placed, *faithfulness, reliability, fidelity, commitment*’.²³ In these cases πίστις refers to something in accord with someone else’s confidence or trust. In contrast, the second definition of πίστις refers to trusting or having confidence in someone or something else.²⁴ In other words, the basic distinction is between whether πίστις is ‘passive’ or ‘active’ — whether it refers to an action or state in accord with someone else’s trust (passive) or an action or state of trusting in someone or something else (active).²⁵

Some Pauline scholars are hesitant to see this distinction because Greek uses one word (πίστις) where English typically uses two different words (‘faithfulness’ and ‘faith’). But this does not prove that πίστις means both ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time, for one word can have different (although related) meanings in different contexts.²⁶ Linguists refer to this phenomenon as polysemy.²⁷ In fact,

confianza) (Amador Ángel García Santos, ‘πίστις’, uses 1 and 2, *Diccionario del Griego Bíblico: Setenta y Nuevo Testamento* [Navarra, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2011]).

²² ‘πίστις’, uses 1.b and 1.c, *BDAG*.

²³ ‘πίστις’, use 1.a, *BDAG*.

²⁴ Sometimes the object of faith is clearly stated (‘πίστις’, uses 2.a-c, *BDAG*), although more often it is not (‘πίστις’, use 2.d, *BDAG*).

²⁵ This language, ‘passive’ and ‘active’, is commonly used by Greek lexicographers for πίστις and its cognates. Note that in using ‘active’ and ‘passive’ I am not referring to a technical category of syntax, nor am I referring to the theological sense of faith as an activity or a passive reception of Christ.

²⁶ One confusing aspect of Downing’s argument for sustained ambiguity in πίστις is his call to discern ‘family resemblances among uses of particular lexemes’ (‘Ambiguity and Faith’, 156). The various meanings of πίστις are certainly related to one another, or they would be homonyms, not different meanings of one word. But this does not mean that πίστις means both ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time.

²⁷ ‘A term used in semantic analysis to refer to a lexical item which has a range of different meanings’ (David Crystal, ‘polysemy’, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 6th ed. [Oxford: Blackwell, 2008]). See Matlock, who also appeals to the polysemy to explain the meaning of πίστις (‘Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate’, 6). Another way to analyze this phenomenon is from a monosematic bias in which a lexeme has only one abstract meaning but pragmatic variations in actual usage (note the linguistic distinction between semantics and pragmatics; see also the helpful discussion of Gregory P. Fewster, *Creation Language in Romans 8: A Study in Monosemy* [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 18-47). But in this alternative theory, it is still

even the English word 'faith' has more than one meaning. While it normally means 'belief', 'trust', or 'confidence' (the active meaning),²⁸ in the phrases 'good faith' and 'bad faith' it can refer to 'fidelity' or 'loyalty' and 'faithlessness' or 'treachery' (the passive meaning).²⁹ Similarly, while the cognate adjective 'faithful' in English can mean 'trustworthy' or 'reliable' (the passive meaning),³⁰ in the plural phrase 'the faithful' it can carry the more archaic meaning of persons full of faith or characterized by faith — 'true believers' (the active meaning).³¹ My point is that even the English words 'faith' and 'faithful' are polysemous, having a range of different (although related) meanings. We should at least be open to a similar phenomenon with the Greek word πίστις.

Further, if Paul does distinguish between different meanings of πίστις, we will misunderstand his arguments if we attempt to include every meaning in one place. This is the lexical fallacy Barr called 'illegitimate totality transfer', shoe-horning every possible meaning of a word into one particular use of that word.³² It is true that authors occasionally use deliberate ambiguity in their language, but typically 'context serves to *eliminate* multiple meanings'.³³ And if we fail to distinguish those meanings, we will misunderstand the text.³⁴ The question is, of course, whether a distinction between the active and passive meanings of πίστις is actually found in Paul's letters, to which I now turn.

recognized that a word may have different (although related) meanings *in different contexts*.

²⁸ 'Faith', use I, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²⁹ 'Faith', use III.11, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

³⁰ 'Faithfulness', use 5, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

³¹ 'Faithfulness', use 7, *Oxford English Dictionary*. (On the archaic nature of this use see use 1.) This archaic meaning of 'faithful' is also found in the AV's translation of τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ as 'faithful Abraham' in Gal. 3:9. Modern translations translate 'Abraham who believed' (NRSV) or 'Abraham, the man of faith' (NIV 2011).

³² On 'illegitimate totality transfer' see Barr, *Semantics*, 218. See also David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 124-25.

³³ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, revised and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 150.

³⁴ So, Silva, *Biblical Words*, 150-51. He goes on to say 'we should assume *one* meaning unless there are strong *exegetical* (literary, contextual) grounds to the contrary' (*Biblical Words*, 151).

2. 'Faith' and 'Faithfulness' as Distinct Meanings of Πίστις in Paul

In the letters traditionally attributed to Paul, the word πίστις occurs 142 times.³⁵ In this section, I will observe two specific contexts in which πίστις means 'faithfulness' and not 'faith'. Then, I will walk through two categories of evidence in which πίστις means 'faith' and not 'faithfulness'.

2.1 Πίστις in Contexts Requiring the Meaning 'Faithfulness'

There are at least two places in Paul where πίστις must mean 'faithfulness' and not 'faith'. In Romans 3:2-3, Paul says that the Jewish people were 'entrusted (ἐπιστεύθησαν) with the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2).³⁶ In response to this situation, Paul asks

What if some were unfaithful (*ēpistēsan*)? Does their faithlessness (*apistia*) nullify the faithfulness (*pistin*) of God?

τί γάρ; εἰ ἡπίστησάν τινες, μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ καταργήσῃ;

Since the passive of πιστεύω identifies the Jewish people as the object of trust (in other words God entrusted them with his oracles), it seems clear that ἀπιστία should be translated as their failure to act in accordance with that trust (and not to their 'unbelief'³⁷). In contrast, then, with the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people, πίστις must refer to God's 'faithfulness' to what he had revealed in his oracles.

The context of Titus 2:10 also requires that πίστις be translated 'faithfulness' and not 'faith'. Paul exhorts slaves to submit to their masters in all things. One way to do this is not to embezzle or pilfer money. Paul then gives slaves a positive exhortation:

not pilfering, but showing all good faith (*pistin*)

³⁵ Three of these occurrences are textually uncertain: Rom. 5:2; Rom. 16:26; and 1 Tim. 2:7. For this article, I am assuming that Paul wrote the disputed Pauline letters (Eph., Col., 2 Thess., 1 Tim., 2 Tim., and Titus). But the points I am making do not rest on the question of authorship as the evidence spans both the undisputed and disputed letters. The disputed letters at least show how early associates or imitators of Paul used πίστις.

³⁶ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

³⁷ Contra, e.g., Cranfield, who translates ἀπιστία as 'unbelief' because of how the word is typically used elsewhere in the NT (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975], I 180.

μη νοσφιζομένους, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν πίστιν ἐνδεικνυμένους ἀγαθήν

Because of the contrast with thievery, this exhortation cannot be calling slaves to demonstrate ‘faith’ in the active meaning. Instead, it is calling slaves to demonstrate that they are worthy objects of their masters’ trust (passive meaning).³⁸ Interestingly, the ESV uses the English phrase ‘good faith’ in the passive sense of showing fidelity. Other translations have ‘showing all good fidelity’ (AV), ‘to show complete and perfect fidelity’ (NRSV), or ‘to show that they can be fully trusted’ (NIV 2011).

It should be observed here that, outside of the disputed uses in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate (in places like Romans 3 and Galatians 2–3), Paul rarely uses πίστις with the passive meaning ‘faithfulness’. Besides the two examples shown above, there are only a handful of places where the word may mean ‘faithfulness’ in Paul: in several virtue lists (Gal. 5:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Tim. 3:10), in a description of the Thessalonians’ endurance and ‘faithfulness’ through persecution (2 Thess. 1:4), in a self-description of Paul as a teacher of the Gentiles ‘in fidelity and truthfulness’ (ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) (1 Tim. 2:7), and in a unique usage which refers to danger of widows marrying and abandoning their ‘former pledge’ (τὴν πρώτην πίστιν) (to celibacy?) (1 Tim. 5:12).³⁹ But the majority of Paul’s uses of πίστις refer to the active meaning ‘faith’.⁴⁰

³⁸ Mutschler agrees that πίστις here should be translated as ‘loyalty’ (*Treue*) or ‘honesty’ (*Redlichkeit*) because of the contrast with thievery (Bernhard Mutschler, *Glaube in dem Pastoralbriefen: Pistis als Mitte christlicher Existenz* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2010), 235–36). So, William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 416.

³⁹ *BDAG* reads this usage as the oath of a woman to her [former?] husband (‘πίστις’, use 1.b). But Mounce notes that most commentators take this usage as a reference to a pledge of celibacy (*Pastoral Epistles*, 291), even though he takes the phrase as a reference to ‘the faith’ widows abandoned when they married non-Christians (*Pastoral Epistles*, 291–92). Mutschler translates πίστις as ‘loyalty’ (*Treue*) here and sees remarriage as a breaking of the special relationship that official widows in the community had with Christ (*Glaube in dem Pastoralbriefen*, 332). Note that Mutschler also suggests that πίστις in 1 Tim. 1:4 refers to faithfulness (*Glaube in dem Pastoralbriefen*, 384), but in my view it more clearly refers to faith.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that, according to my count, approximately 20 of Paul’s 142 uses of πίστις refer to ‘the faith’ (*fides quae creditur*). And my count of this use in the Pastorals is slightly higher than Mutschler’s analysis (see *Glaube in dem Pastoralbriefen*, 384).

2.2 Πίστις in Contexts Requiring the Meaning ‘Faith’

There are two categories of evidence in which πίστις must mean ‘faith’ and not ‘faithfulness’ in Paul. Both categories involve contexts in which Paul indicates in some way that πίστις has an object — that it refers to an action or state of trusting in someone or something else.

a. Πίστις Used Interchangeably with Πιστεύω

First, in many contexts, πίστις is used interchangeably or in parallel with the verb πιστεύω. Crucially, *the verb πιστεύω always means trust or belief or confidence in an object*.⁴¹ Even when πιστεύω has the rare meaning ‘I entrust’ in Paul, it refers to someone trusting a person (dative object) with a thing (accusative object).⁴² The verb does not mean to be faithful or to act in a faithful manner, verbal ideas which were communicated in ancient Greek by εἰμί + πιστός (for example Heb. 3:2, 5; 1 John 1:9) and by πιστόω.⁴³ Thus when Paul uses πίστις interchangeably or in parallel with the active voice of πιστεύω, the noun should be translated with the active meaning, as ‘faith’ in an object.

I will work through the examples roughly in canonical order. However, because the first example is controversial, I will begin with 2 Corinthians 4:13, which illustrates the point nicely. In this passage, Paul says he is motivated to speak in the midst of suffering out of faith in God, just like the psalmist:

Since we have the same spirit of faith [*pisteōs*] according to what has been written, ‘I believed [*episteusa*], and so I spoke’, we also believe [*pisteuomen*], and so we also speak.

Ἐχοντες δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον· ἐπίστευσα, διὸ ἐλάλησα, καὶ ἡμεῖς πιστευομεν, διὸ καὶ λαλοῦμεν.

Paul speaks of himself having the same πίστις as the psalmist, and then he says ‘we also believe’ (like the psalmist). Thus his πίστις and his

⁴¹ ‘πιστεύω’, *BDAG*. In his critique of Campbell, Dodd observes that πιστεύω only means ‘trust’ (Brian J. Dodd, ‘Romans 1:17 — A Crux Interpretum for the *Pistis Christou* Debate’, *JBL* 114 (1995), 471). And Hays also recognizes this fact when he observes that ‘Gal. 2:16 speaks clearly and unambiguously of faith in Christ ... of an act of believing/trusting directed toward Christ as “object”’ (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 123). It should be noted that the object of πιστεύω is not always stated.

⁴² This use of πιστεύω is found in Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 9:17; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; and Titus 1:3.

⁴³ ‘πιστόω’, use 1, *BDAG*. The verb is not used in this sense in the NT, but for examples see ‘πιστόω’, uses II and III, *LSJ*.

believing refer to the same thing — in other words πίστις refers to Paul’s ‘faith’, not his ‘faithfulness’.⁴⁴

The first example in canonical order is the thesis statement of Romans (Rom. 1:16-17). Paul says that the gospel is God’s power for salvation ‘to everyone who believes’ (παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, *panti tō pisteuonti*), and then he explains *why* this is the case:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith (*ek pisteōs*) for faith (*eis pistin*), as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith (*ek pisteōs*).’

δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

Here, because the three uses of πίστις explain the reason why ‘everyone who believes’ the gospel is saved, it seems most likely that πίστις refers to ‘faith’ of ‘everyone who believes’.⁴⁵ Campbell argues that both uses of ἐκ πίστεως in Romans 1:17 refer to the faithfulness of Christ, because it would be ‘absurd’ for Paul to say that human faith is the means by which God’s cosmic, eschatological righteousness is revealed.⁴⁶ But I find this no more absurd than to say that Abraham was justified by his (human) faith, which is exactly what Paul argues in Romans 4. Dunn argues that the first use of ἐκ πίστεως refers to God’s faithfulness and that the second use of ἐκ πίστεως in Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 embraces both God’s faithfulness and human faith. He reasons that the next use of πίστις in Romans 3:3 refers to God’s faithfulness and that divine faithfulness is a major theme in Romans.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The suggestion that Paul is reading the psalm messianically does not alter the point I am making, for πίστις still refers to Paul’s ‘faith’ (for this interpretation, see Kenneth Schenck, ‘2 Corinthians and the Πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate’, *CBQ* 70 (2008), 524-37 and Douglas A. Campbell, ‘2 Corinthians 4:13: Evidence in Paul That Christ Believes’, *JBL* 128 (2009), 337-56).

⁴⁵ So, Schreiner, who observes, ‘The use of the participle πιστεύοντι in verse 16 demonstrates that *human* faith is in view’ (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998], 72).

⁴⁶ Campbell, ‘Romans 1:17’, 270-77. Interestingly, he thinks that the second use of πίστις in Rom. 1:17 (εἰς πίστιν, *eis pistin*) ‘undoubtedly refers to the faith of the Christian,’ because it picks up on the language of Rom. 1:16 and Rom. 1:5 (‘Romans 1:17’, 277n39). Campbell also argues for a Messianic reading of Paul’s quotation of Hab. 2:4 (‘Romans 1:17’, 277-85). But Heliso has now shown that pre-Pauline interpretation of Hab. 2:4 was not typically Messianic, making the Christological interpretation only a possibility (Desta Heliso, *Pistis and the Righteous One: A Study of Romans 1:17 against the Background of Scripture and Second Temple Jewish Literature* [Tübingen: Mohr, 2007]).

⁴⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 44. He also argues that ἐκ indicates the source of the revelation, which is from God not man (*Romans 1–8*,

But nothing in Paul's argument indicates that we should interpret Romans 1:17 in light of Romans 3:3 or the theme of divine faithfulness. And this broader theme should certainly not overshadow the immediate context. In an explanation of Romans 1:16, Paul uses πίστις in Romans 1:17 to refer to the 'faith' of everyone who believes.⁴⁸

Romans 4 is one of the most important discussions of faith in the New Testament, and it also contains some of the clearest examples of the interchange of πιστεύω and πίστις. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in the beginning of the chapter to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by faith not by works: 'For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed (ἐπίστευσεν) God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"' (Rom. 4:3). He then explains Genesis 15:6 using πιστεύω and πίστις interchangeably:

And to the one who does not work but believes (*pisteuonti*) in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith (*pistis*) is counted as righteousness (verse 5)

τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῃ
λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην

Here, πίστις clearly refers to 'faith' in the God who justifies the ungodly. Another example is found in Romans 4:9:

For we say that faith (*pistis*) was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

λέγομεν γάρ· ἐλογίσθη τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

This verse is a paraphrase of Paul's earlier quotation of Genesis 15:6. Thus it is clear that πίστις is a shorthand for the statement 'Abraham believed God'. In Romans 4:17, Paul again uses πιστεύω to speak of Abraham as the one who believed in the God 'who gives life to the

44). But it is more likely that ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν is a Greek idiom for progression and that both uses of πίστις have the same sense of human faith (see John W. Taylor, 'From Faith to Faith: Romans 1.17 in the Light of Greek Idiom', *NTS* 50 [2004], 337-48).

⁴⁸ In my view, it is also likely that Hab. 2:4 in its original context also refers to human faith. For while נֶאֱמָר typically means 'faithfulness' in Hebrew, in the context of Habakkuk's prophesy it likely refers to 'faith' in God's surprising ways. See especially Hab. 1:5, which uses the hiphil of נֶאֱמָר (to believe): 'Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told'. I am indebted to Mike Shepherd for my thinking here (see Michael B. Shepherd, *The Twelve Prophets in the New Testament*, SBL 140 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010)), 50.

dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist’.⁴⁹ Then he explains his faith further in 4:19-20 with the antonyms πίστις and ἀπιστία:

He did not weaken in faith (*tē pistei*) when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief (*tē apistia*) made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith (*tē pistei*) as he gave glory to God

καὶ μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει κατενόησεν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα [ἤδη] νεκρωμένον, ἑκατονταετῆς που ὑπάρχων, καὶ τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μήτρας Σάρρας· εἰς δὲ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἀλλ’ ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει, δοὺς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ

Once again, in the context of 4:17, it is clear that πίστις refers to Abraham’s faith in God and not to Abraham’s ‘faithfulness’. This is not to say that the *concept* of faithfulness is missing from the passage. Abraham’s faith was one that persevered ‘in hope ... against hope’ (Rom. 4:18). In this sense it was a ‘faithful faith’. But the *word* πίστις in Romans 4, in parallel with the verb πιστεύω, clearly refers to Abraham’s faith in God.

More examples can be found in Romans 9, 10, and 14. In Romans 9:30-33 Paul reflects on the irony of the Gentiles receiving the righteousness which is ἐκ πίστεως and Israel failing to reach it because they did not pursue it ἐκ πίστεως. He then shows that this situation accords with Isaiah’s ancient prophesy:

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes (*ho pisteuōn*) in him will not be put to shame.

ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ καταίσχυνθήσεται.

Paul’s quotation uses the verb πιστεύω with an object — namely, the stone of stumbling (Christ). Thus it is clear Paul has been speaking of the Gentiles’ ‘faith’ in Christ and Israel’s lack of ‘faith’ in Christ.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁹ The syntax of this verse is difficult, but it seems that the object of ἐπίστευσεν is the relative pronoun οὗ (whose antecedent is θεοῦ). The relative pronoun is genitive because of attraction to its antecedent θεοῦ, which is the object of the preposition κατέναντι. See BDF §294. The point is that God is once again said to be the object of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4:17.

⁵⁰ A few authors have insisted that Paul never speaks of faith in Christ (e.g., Williams, ‘Again *Pistis Christou*’, 434; one must see 442 for his full explanation, which attempts to explain (away) Gal. 2:16). But in Rom. 9:33 and 10:11, Paul clearly

Romans 10:5-17, a lengthy discussion of righteousness ἐκ πίστεως, we again see an interchange between the verb πιστεύω (verses 4, 10, 11 [quoting Isaiah again], 14 [2x], 16) and the noun πίστις (verses 6, 8, 17).⁵¹ And in Romans 14:1, although there is some debate about the exact nature of πίστις in this chapter, we can at least say that it refers to ‘faith’ in an object for it is used interchangeably with πιστεύω in Romans 14:2.

In the Corinthian correspondence, πίστις and πιστεύω are used interchangeably in Paul’s discussion about the gospel and the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. He tells the Corinthians that they believed (πιστεύω) in the good news that Christ died for their sins and was raised according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:2, 11). Then he speaks of their πίστις being in vain and worthless if Christ has not been raised (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). In context πίστις must refer to their ‘faith’ in the gospel, not their faithfulness. Another interesting passage is 1 Corinthians 14:22. Although Paul does not use the word πίστις in this verse, he contrasts πιστεύω with the cognate adjective ἄπιστος. Like πίστις, ἄπιστος can have either a passive meaning (unbelievable) or an active meaning (unbelieving).⁵² But in 1 Corinthians 14:22, in reference to non-Christians, it clearly means ‘unbelieving’, because Paul contrasts the ἄπιστοι with ‘those who believe’.

Thus tongues are a sign not for believers (*tois pisteuousin*) but for unbelievers (*apistois*), while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers (*apistois*) but for believers (*pisteuousin*).

ὥστε αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημεῖον εἰσιν οὐ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις, ἡ δὲ προφητεία οὐ τοῖς ἀπίστοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.⁵³

speaks of faith in Christ, as he does in Gal. 2:16 and Phil. 1:29. In the disputed letters, see Eph. 1:13, Col. 2:5, 1 Tim. 1:16; and 1 Tim. 3:16.

⁵¹ So, Dunn: “the righteousness that is ἐκ πίστεως” (Rom. 10:6) is elaborated in a sequence of obviously interchangeable πίστις and πιστεύω references (10:8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16), climaxing in the conclusion “So πίστις comes from hearing (ἐξ ἀκοῆς)” (10:17), where the πίστις clearly encapsulates the believing that is the outcome of the preaching (10:14)” (James D. G. Dunn, ‘ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ: A Key to the Meaning of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’, in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], 363).

⁵² ‘ἄπιστος’, *BDAG*.

⁵³ The adjective ἄπιστος is actually a common designation for the non-Christians in the Corinthian correspondence (see 1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12, 13, 14 [2x], 15; 2 Cor. 4:4; 6:14, 15 [note also πιστός in this verse]). And in light of 1 Cor. 14:22, we should understand these designations as references to ‘unbelievers’.

Galatians contains the examples which are disputed most, because of the debate over πίστις Χριστοῦ. The most important example is in Galatians 2:16:

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (*dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*), so we also have believed (*episteusamen*) in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ (*ek pisteōs Christou*) and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

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

As in Romans 1:16-17, Paul logically connects πίστις and πιστεύω. He speaks of justification by πίστις as the *reason* he and Peter have believed (πιστεύω) in Christ and of justification by πίστις as the *result* of his and Peter’s believing (πιστεύω) in Christ. One would expect then that these two uses of πίστις refer to human ‘faith’ in Christ. Indeed, earlier scholars saw the parallel between πίστις and πιστεύω in Galatians 2:16 as the lynchpin supporting the translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ as ‘faith in Christ’.⁵⁴ Recent scholars who hold to the subjective genitive view have charged this translation with ‘redundancy’.⁵⁵ But this charge is surprising given the fact that in this verse Paul says that one cannot be justified by ‘works of the law’ *three times* in this verse!⁵⁶ Similar examples of the interchange between πίστις and πιστεύω can be seen throughout Paul’s argument in Galatians 3. For example, Paul says in Galatians 3:6-7 that Abraham ‘believed God’ (ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ) and then concludes that

it is those of faith (*hoi ek pisteōs*) who are the sons of Abraham.

οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ.

⁵⁴ Noted by Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 122n9. In response, Hays suggests that the approach of those who rely on the parallel between πίστις and πιστεύω in Gal. 2:16 ‘fails to reckon sufficiently with the extreme, almost epigrammatic, concision of this sentence and its place within the literary structure of the letter’ (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 122). I cannot respond to his full argument here, except to observe that the immediate context of the verse seems to cut against his reading.

⁵⁵ See the many examples of those who have made this charge listed in R. Barry Matlock, ‘The Rhetoric of πίστις in Paul: Galatians 2.16, 3.22, and Philippians 3.9’, *JSNT* 30 (2007), 175.

⁵⁶ See Matlock for a much more nuanced response, arguing that the rhetoric of this verse is based upon repetition (‘The Rhetoric of πίστις’, 199).

As other scholars have observed, the parallel between πιστεύω and πίστις in this argument suggests strongly that πίστις refers to human ‘faith’ in God.⁵⁷

A final example is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:12-13. Here Paul contrasts those ‘who did not believe the truth’ (οἱ μὴ πιστεύσαντες τῇ ἀληθείᾳ) with those whom God has chosen for salvation through ‘belief in the truth’ (πίστει ἀληθείας). The parallel in this contrast is exact, indicating that we should translate πίστις as ‘faith’ and the genitive of ἀλήθεια as the object of that faith.⁵⁸

b. Πίστις Used with an Object of Faith

The second category of evidence in Paul contains fewer examples but is no less significant. In some contexts Paul uses πίστις with a preposition to indicate the object of faith, requiring the translation ‘faith’ and not ‘faithfulness’.⁵⁹ The first example is also the clearest one in Paul’s letters. In 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 Paul tells the Corinthians that his preaching was not with human wisdom but divine power

so that your faith (*pistis*) might not rest in the wisdom of men (*en sophia anthrōpōn*) but in the power of God (*en dynamei theou*).

ἵνα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾔ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ.

Here, two prepositional phrases with ἐν state the object of the Corinthians’ faith, requiring the translation ‘faith’ not ‘faithfulness’.⁶⁰ A similar construction is found in a more controversial text, Galatians 3:26:

for in Christ Jesus (*en Christō Iēsou*) you are all sons of God, through faith (*tēs pisteōs*).

Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

⁵⁷ Dunn, ‘ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ’, 360-61, so G. Walter Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts*, JSNTSupp 29 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 113.

⁵⁸ Two other examples could be added to this list, but they are highly disputed. One may argue convincingly that πίστις and πιστεύω in Rom. 3:22 and Gal. 3:22 are mutually interpreting so that πίστις refers to ‘faith in Jesus Christ’. Scholars who hold to the subjective genitive view call such a reading ‘redundant’ (as we have already noted in the case of Gal. 2:16) but Matlock makes a convincing case for why Paul uses repetition in both verses (see ‘The Rhetoric of πίστις’, 184-87 and 187-93).

⁵⁹ I am not using ‘object’ to refer to a technical syntactical relationship but to the fact that if πίστις was transformed into a transitive verb, it would take this word as an object. This is similar to how we often speak of ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’ genitives.

⁶⁰ Note also that Paul has already called the Corinthians ‘believers’ in 1 Cor. 1:21.

Commentators and English translations tend to translate the prepositional phrase ‘in Christ Jesus’ as a reference to union with Christ (which can be seen in the ESV translation here).⁶¹ But the construction is similar to 1 Corinthians 2:5, the prepositional phrase immediately follows πίστις, and Paul has already spoken of Christ Jesus as the object of faith in Galatians 2:16.⁶² Thus, there are good reasons to translate ‘in Christ Jesus’ as a reference to the object of πίστις, although this use is not as clear as 1 Corinthians 2:5 and ‘in Christ Jesus’ may refer to union with Christ.⁶³

Three more examples are found in the thanksgiving sections of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul says he has heard of his audience’s πίστις and love which he modifies with prepositional phrases that indicate the objects of their faith and love.

because I have heard of your faith (*pistin*) in the Lord Jesus (*en tō kuriō Iēsou*) and your love toward all the saints (*eis pantas tous hagiōus*) (Eph. 1:15)

ἀκούσας τὴν καθ’ ὑμᾶς πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους

since we heard of your faith (*pistin*) in Christ Jesus (*en Christō Iēsou*) and of the love that you have for all the saints (*eis pantas tous hagiōus*) (Col. 1:4)

ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους

Just as the prepositional phrase beginning with εἰς indicates the object of their love, so the prepositional phrase beginning with ἐν indicates

⁶¹ So Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 256. Hays notes this translation as the universal critical interpretation of Gal. 3:26 (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 155). But Longenecker speaks of Christ as the object of faith in this verse even though he also sees a reference to union with Christ (Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1990], 152).

⁶² Choi objects that πίστις + ἐν should not be understood as ‘faith in’ (ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5-6, 477). But 1 Cor. 2:5 gives a clear example of πίστις + ἐν indicating the object of faith.

⁶³ A similar example is 2 Tim. 3:15, where Paul speaks of Timothy’s acquaintance with the Scriptures ‘which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’. Here, the ESV translates the prepositional phrase ‘in Christ Jesus’ as the object of faith. But it is more likely a reference to union with Christ, because 2 Tim. has the same construction (article + ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) modifying ‘life’ (1:1), ‘love’ (1:13), ‘grace’ (2:1), and ‘salvation’ (2:10). On this I am indebted to Downs’s observations (Downs, ‘Faith[fulness] in Christ Jesus’), although I do not agree with all of his conclusions.

the object of their faith. Thus, we should translate πίστις with the active meaning of ‘faith’ in an object. Paul speaks in a similar way in Philemon 5, but with the preposition πρὸς. Many scholars rightly see a chiasm here:

A because I hear of your love

B and of the faith (*tēn pistin*)

B that you have toward the Lord Jesus (*pros ton kyrion Iēsoun*)

A and for all the saints (*eis pantas tous hagious*)

A ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην

B καὶ τὴν πίστιν

B ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν

A καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους,

Like the thanksgivings in Ephesians and Colossians, here Paul says Philemon’s love is for all the saints (A) and that his faith is in the Lord Jesus (B). Thus, with a stated object of faith, πίστις should be translated ‘faith’ and not ‘faithfulness’.

In two final examples, Paul uses the prepositions πρὸς and εἰς to indicate the object of faith. In Colossians 2:5, Paul says that even though he is absent physically he is with them in spirit and rejoicing to see

your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ (*tēs eis Christon pisteōs humōn*).

τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν.

Here, the prepositional phrase with εἰς modifying πίστις in attributive position clearly indicates the object of their faith.⁶⁴ And in 1 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul uses the same construction with πρὸς to speak of the Thessalonians’ famed πίστις in God.

your faith in God (*hē pistis ... hē pros ton theon*) has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν ἡ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐξελέγηθη, ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι.

Since πρὸς likely indicates that the object of their faith (compare Philemon 5), their πίστις should be understood as their ‘faith’ in God.

⁶⁴ Peterman notes, ‘The εἰς-phrase unambiguously clarifies the object of the verbal noun πίστις’ (G. W. Peterman, ‘Δικαιωθῶμεν διὰ τῆς ἐκ Χριστοῦ πίστεως’, *NTS* 56 [2009], 164).

2.3 Summary

In summary, there are many contexts in which a clear distinction between the active and passive meanings of πίστις is found in Paul. Although Paul rarely uses the passive meaning, there are at least two contexts in which πίστις must mean 'faithfulness' and not 'faith' (Rom. 3:3; Titus 2:10). There are also many places in which πίστις must mean 'faith' and not 'faithfulness' — namely contexts in which πίστις is used interchangeably or in parallel with πιστεύω, and contexts in which πίστις has an object.

3. Conclusion

Does πίστις mean both 'faith' and 'faithfulness' at the same time in Paul? The cumulative evidence of this study leads me to say 'no'. Scholars like Hays and Downing argue that Paul uses deliberate ambiguity in his πίστις language.⁶⁵ But even these scholars agree that we should search for *clarity* in interpreting Paul's language.⁶⁶ And in this article I have observed many places in Paul's letters where πίστις is clearly not ambiguous — either it means 'faithfulness' (and not 'faith'), or it means 'faith' (and not 'faithfulness'). Therefore, this distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' as different meanings of πίστις is not 'anachronistic' or merely a test based upon the English language or a product of the modern theological distinction between faith and faithfulness. Rather, the distinction between these different meanings of πίστις is found in Paul's usage itself. Interpreters of Paul will certainly disagree with one another about whether to translate a particular use of πίστις with 'faithfulness' or 'faith' or 'the faith' (or something else).⁶⁷ But they should not translate πίστις with the gloss

⁶⁵ Hays argues this position because Paul's language is more 'poetic' than univocal (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 226-29), Downing because ancient authors did not reflect as much as modern scholars on the definitions and nuances of specific words ('Ambiguity and Faith').

⁶⁶ Hays: 'I am not proposing that NT exegesis should abandon the quest for *clarity* in interpreting Paul' (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 228). Downing: 'That is not to suggest that ancient authors lacked concern for clarity, lucidity, or effective persuasion and detailed agreement in practice' ('Ambiguity and Faith', 151).

⁶⁷ For example, see Poirier's argument that πίστις in Rom. 12:3 and 6 refers to the measure of 'trust' or 'stewardship' entrusted to the Christian (John C. Poirier, 'The Measure of Stewardship: Πίστις in Romans 12:3', *TynBul* 59 (2008), 145-52).

‘faith(fulness),’ for πίστις does not mean both ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ at the same time in Paul.