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"The Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah"

In the fall of 1979 my mind was jarred by a Lutheran journal from California, *Verdict: A Journal of Theology*, in which there was an article written by D.W.B. Robinson entitled: "Justification and the Faith of Jesus." It was an article copied by permission from *The Reformed Theological Review* 29, No. 3 (Sept.-Dec. 1970), pp. 71-81. That was the beginning of the *subjective-objective genitive debate* for me, but a move from ministry to an academic institution, then into administration, and finally back into the classroom has delayed my own personal work. (At least that is my excuse!)

I have stood on the sidelines and watched the debate progress, especially at the SBL Pauline Studies Group in 1991, when Hays and Dunn presented their opposing views.¹ Since that time much has been written, but the results have been mixed. Most of the major commentaries on Romans still hold to the objective genitive view with one major exception,² while ironically the newer commentaries on Galatians have been authored by scholars who accept the subjective genitive view or something close to it.³ I say *ironic* because you can't have it both ways. The average layman would be confused by this, but then perhaps the average layman would not make the comparison.

It is my goal to write for the educated layman out there, hoping that preachers and teachers of the Bible, too, will understand the debate and at least give the subjective genitive view a fair hearing, since every major English translation of the Bible presents only the objective genitive view. Also, I wish to include the entire New Testament in this survey and argument. The following is a brief look at what a survey would cover and what specific texts would be involved. This will not be a scholarly or complete presentation. Rather, it will be a recital of various texts arguing only for the subjective

¹ See the debate between Dunn and Hays, "Faith of Christ," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, 714-29 (Hays) and 730-44 (Dunn).

² N.T. Wright's commentary on "Romans" in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, Abingdon, 2002. I agree totally with his "subjective genitive" approach to Romans. The interpretation of Romans 3:21-26 in this manner affects the entire interpretation of the Book of Romans.

³ See Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41, (Dallas: Word, 1990); J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, The Anchor Bible, 33A, (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 9, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992); and Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, ANTC, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

genitive view. Obviously the objective genitive is already established in the major English Bible translations and commentaries (mainly on Romans).

The Romans Riddle

The key text in this debate is Romans 3:21-26. How one reads this pericope affects every other passage in the Roman letter. Eight times in Pauline letters the phrase "faith of Jesus Christ" or similar expressions are used (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16a, 16b, 20; 3:22; Eph 3:12; and Phil 3:9). In the Greek text of Romans 3:21-26 one will observe that verse 22 has *dia pisteos [Iesou] Christou* while verse 26 has *ton ek pisteos Iesou*. The NIV (the English version I am obligated to use both in the church and classroom because of its popularity) translates both phrases as objective genitives: v. 22 - "through faith in Jesus Christ" and v. 26 - "those who have faith in Jesus." The problem with this translation is that there is a severe redundancy in verse 22: "to all who believe" and a lack of good parallelism with Rom 3:3 and 4:16 with verse 26. In Rom 4:16 an identical phrase grammatically is presented: *to ek pisteos Abraam*. This latter phrase cannot mean "faith in Abraham," rather it must read "faith[fulness] of Abraham." Likewise, in Rom 3:3 the phrase, *ten pistin tou theou*, must mean "the faithfulness of God." In my mind it would be difficult to read these phrases as subjective genitives and not do the same with verse 26. It would be a puzzle to me if Paul meant something different grammatically. Thus, I believe, in Paul's mind he is progressively moving from the "faithfulness of God" (Rom 3:3) to the "faithfulness of Jesus," (Rom 3:22, 26) and finally, the paradigm for all Christians, the "faith[fulness] of Abraham" (Rom 4:16).

But there is another phrase in Rom 3:21-26 that must be considered if the subjective genitive is taken seriously. Verse 25a is translated in the NIV: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." But what can "through faith in his blood" mean? Almost all English Bibles treat this Greek phrase as referring to our faith and in a literal fashion, by use of the comma, have the idea that we must have faith in Jesus' blood (his death on the cross). If so, it is the only place in the New Testament where we are told to have "faith in his blood," although that is a literal rendering of the Greek text: *dia pisteos en to autou haimati*. Without presenting any detailed arguments for my reading and realizing how difficult this verse is to interpret as evidenced by scholarly articles, I suggest that this phrase is elliptical. That is, Paul has left out the genitive *Iesou Christou* since he had already mentioned it above (v. 22). The NIV should have no comma after "atonement." Accepting the "subjective genitive" reading and using the NIV wording, I would translate verse 25a in this manner: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through [his] faithfulness by [at the cost of] his blood." The latter phrase is explaining the extent or maybe content to the faithfulness of Christ. His faithfulness took him all the way to the cross and there He shed his blood on behalf of the world. He became a "sin offering" for us all (see Rom 8:3).

Before we give a coherent translation from the Greek text of Rom 3:21-26, we must first make a few comments about earlier statements in the Roman letter. Paul stated in his introductory remarks that the whole purpose of his apostleship is "to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (1:5). The phrase, *hupakoen pisteos*, "obedience of faith," will play a large theological role throughout the letter (see Rom 15:18; 16:26; cp. 5:19). All are agreed that Rom 1:16-17 is the theme of

the entire book. However, verse 17 is translated by the NIV only with the objective genitive in mind. With the subjective genitive view in mind this is how I would translate and interpret Rom 1:17: "For God's righteousness in it (the gospel) is being revealed from faith (*ek pisteos*) unto faith (*eis pistin*), just as it has been written, 'But the righteous [one] shall live from faith[fulness].'" Rather than accepting the NIV's "by faith from first to last," meaning "our faith," I suggest that *ek pisteos* refers to either God's faithfulness or Christ's or both and that *eis pistin* is referring to our responding faith. This suggestion helps us understand at least two puzzles: 1) Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4b and 2) the phrases in Rom 3:22 that are redundant in the NIV.

First, it seems to me that Paul is using Hab 2:4b messianically.⁴ The phrase, *ho dikaios*, in several references in the New Testament refer to Jesus who is indeed *the Righteous One*.⁵ Paul seems to go to great length to emphasize in Rom 1:1-3:20 that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10). If that is the case, then who is "the righteous one" of Rom 1:17? I suggest that Jesus is the *Righteous One* who lived by faith[fulness]. It is not until Rom 5:19 that we learn how we sinners can be made righteous: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." In this verse one can hear the echo of "the obedience of faith" of Rom 1:5. Jesus is the unique "Righteous One" who lived out of faithfulness to the Father so that the world might be saved.⁶ Once we are "made righteous," then we, too, are to live out of faithfulness. In fact, Paul uses Abraham as the paradigm for that kind of faith (Rom 4). And that leads me to my second point.

By understanding the phrase in Rom 3:22 as "the faith[fulness] of Jesus," it parallels the enigmatic phrase of Rom 1:17: *ek pisteos eis pistin* compared with *dia pisteos Christou eis pantas tous pisteuontas*. Thus, *ek pisteos* becomes almost a technical term to refer first to Christ's faithfulness. Only secondarily could it refer to our faith or faithfulness. The second part of the phrase, *eis pistin*, clearly refers to our responding faith to Messiah. Let me give one example before we translate Rom 3:21-26 and finish with Romans.

Romans 5:1-11 is a pericope which seems to have a beautiful inclusion around it. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith (*ek pisteos*), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." I am suggesting here that Paul is saying we have been justified "out of faithfulness," that is, out of Jesus' faithfulness. That is the source of our justification. The NIV's "through" is a poor translation of *ek*. After all, the very next verse (v. 2) notes that "we have gained access *by faith* into this grace in which we now stand." The phrase "by faith" is not attested in a number of manuscripts but that does not take away my point. Why the redundancy if *ek pisteos* of verse 1 refers to our faith? I would even dare to argue that the term, "by faith," may even refer to Jesus' faith[fulness].

⁴ See Walter D. Zorn, "The Messianic Use of Habakkuk 2:4a in Romans," *SCJ*, vol. 1, no. 2., pp. 213-30. Unfortunately a mistake was printed with verse 4a. It should have been verse 4b!

⁵ See Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14, 15; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 Jn 2:1, 29; 3:7; cp. 1 Jn 1:9; Heb 10:38.

⁶ See N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, 1991, especially chapter two: "Adam, Israel and The Messiah," pp. 18-40. It is clear the Gospels present Jesus as the true Israel and thus true Man—as man was meant to be! He was faithful in everyway Adam and thus Israel was not. In other words, Jesus fulfills the mission of Israel. As Wright expressed it: "Jesus stands in the place of Israel" (p. 40). See also another Wright, Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, IVP, 2006, especially p. 501.

Nevertheless, the phrase may have been added to some manuscripts to clarify that we have access to this justification by our *responding faith*.

Verse 9 repeats the same phrase in verse 1 except this time Paul will use a parallel prepositional phrase (taken from Rom 3:25?) to say the same thing: "Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" Note: "justified *ek pisteos*" and "justified *en to haimati autou*." I think Paul has split the near synonymous phrases from Rom 3:25 to form his inclusion: *dia pisteos* has become *ek pisteos* (like the phrase in 1:17) and *en to autou haimati* (Rom 5:9) remains the same with *en to haimati autou* (Rom 3:25). Thus, the inclusion is accomplished by the use of the same words: *oun* ("therefore," vv. 1, 9); *dikaiothentes* ("having been justified," vv. 1, 9); the equivalency of the phrases *ek pisteos* ("from/out of faith[fulness]," v. 1) and *en to haimati autou* ("by/at the cost of his blood," v. 9); *eirenen* ("peace," v. 1) and *katallagen* ("reconciliation"); and perhaps the use of *kauchometha* ("we rejoice," v. 2) with *kauchomenoi* ("rejoic[ing]," v. 11). Having said this, we are now ready to translate Romans 3:21-26.

But now apart from Torah God's righteousness has been manifested, being witnessed to by the Torah and the prophets, indeed God's righteousness [has been manifested] through [Jesus] Messiah's faithfulness for all who are believing; for there is no distinction, for all sin and [continually] fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation (sacrifice of atonement) through [his, Jesus'] faithfulness at the cost of his blood, for a demonstration of his [God's] righteousness because of the passing-over [forgiveness?] of the sins which happened beforehand by the forbearance of God, toward the demonstration of his righteousness in the present time in order that he might be righteous and one who makes righteous the one [who lives] out of Jesus' faithfulness.

The Other Occurrences

Besides the two passages in Rom 3:21-26 where *pistis* is used with a genitive of the proper noun or its pronoun, there are six more occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament: (I will transliterate the phrases where appropriate using the NIV.)

Gal 2:16 (twice): We . . . know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by *pisteos Christou Iesou*. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by *pisteos Christou* and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Gal 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith *te(i) tou huiou tou theou* who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 3:22: But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised *ek pisteos Iesou Christou* might be given to those who believe.

Phil 3:9: And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is *dia pisteos Christou*--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (note: *epi te(i) pistei*).

Eph 3:12: In him and *dia tes pisteos autou* we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Galatians 2:16 is ridiculously redundant if the objective genitive is used as in the NIV. In fact, the preposition *dia* is best translated "through" rather than "by." It is *through Messiah Jesus' faithfulness* that we are justified. Of course, we receive it by trusting in the Messiah (NIV--"So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus," an aorist indicative in the Greek, "we trusted"). We have trusted Messiah Jesus precisely in order that we might be justified *ek pisteos Christou* (by Messiah's faithfulness). Those scholars who were originally against the subjective genitive interpretation opposed it on the grounds that it took away the necessity for our faith in Christ. That doctrinal fear is clearly unfounded. Rather, Gal 2:16 reveals that we should put our trust in Jesus the Messiah precisely because of his faithfulness!

Galatians 2:20 could be viewed either way. The NIV, of course, uses the objective genitive ("I live by faith in the Son of God"), but it could just as easily be construed with the subjective genitive. Looking at the Greek text one could translate: "I live by faith, the [faith] of the Son of God." How could this make sense? The following two participial phrases explain how the faith[fulness] of the Son of God causes us to live. He [Jesus] loved me and gave himself on behalf of (*huper*) me. His love and sacrifice are the marks of the faithfulness of Jesus by which I live.

Galatians 3:22 does not make sense as an objective genitive. That is why the NIV has added "being given" and commas to give it some sense. However, a reading of the Greek text with the subjective genitive in mind poses no problem: "in order that the promise from (*ek*) Jesus [the] Messiah's faithfulness might be given to those who believe." Otherwise, you have to *squeeze* meaning out of the Greek. Not good!

Philippians 3:9 is a very interesting text. It makes very good sense to read it with the subjective genitive in mind. Thus, the contrast is not between my doing works of the law and believing but rather my doing works of law and God's righteousness as manifested in Jesus' faithfulness! I translate the verse: "that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is from law, but the [righteousness] through Messiah's faithfulness, the righteousness from God [which is based] upon the [that very] faithfulness." The latter phrase could be a reference to our responding faith but I think the article is pointing to *the* faithfulness of Messiah.

Ephesians 3:12 is the one verse where a pronoun is used in the place of the proper name of "Jesus" and/or his title "Messiah." Most English translations, of course, translate the phrase as "through our faith in him." The "our" must be understood from a Greek

article before *pisteos*. Only the KJV and Rhiems New Testament translate it "by the faith of him." The latter certainly suggests a subjective genitive. I translate the Greek text as follows: "in whom we have [the] boldness and access with confidence through his [i.e., Messiah Jesus'] faithfulness."

If each of the above texts are interpreted using the subjective genitive, then a person is justified by Christ's faithfulness (Gal 2:16) or, expressed in another way, by those who share Jesus' faithfulness (Rom 3:26). Christ's faithfulness is what the believer lives by (Gal 2:20). The promise of God's Spirit to believers comes by way of Christ's faithfulness (Gal 3:22) and this is for all who continually believe (Rom 3:22b and Phil 3:9). All Christians can have boldness and assurance of salvation because of Christ's faithfulness (Eph 3:12). Indeed, God's righteousness is manifested through Jesus' faithfulness (Rom 3:22). God has presented Jesus as our means/place of forgiveness (atonement) through His faithfulness at the cost of his blood (Rom 3:25).

Contextual Controls

If the above texts are genuine subjective genitives,⁷ then several texts throughout the New Testament must be reevaluated given this context.

Galatians 3:26, 27 reads in NIV: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." A close look at the Greek text reveals that there is an article before the word "faith." This could be understood as "the faith" which Christ uniquely had and brought to earth. Note how Paul speaks of "faith" in this chapter: "Before faith came," (Gal 3:23a), "until faith should be revealed" (Gal 3:23c), "now that faith has come" (Gal 3:25a). Compare these to "until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come" (Gal 3:19b). To speak of Jesus, the Seed, having come is to say that faith has come because Jesus demonstrated perfect faith or faithfulness in his life and ministry on earth. That is why I argue that the article could be pointing back as a reference to this special kind of faith, *the faithfulness in Messiah Jesus*. Indeed, Heb 12:2 underscores this fact.

Hebrews 12:2 offers a strong case for understanding the above texts as subjective genitives. The NIV renders it: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The "our" before "faith" is not in the Greek text, although the article, *tes*, can be understood in some contexts to be possessive. But again the NIV presupposes here the objective genitive. Another approach, using the subjective genitive, one could translate: "Looking unto Jesus, the pioneer (originator) and perfecter (finisher) of the faith." In other words, Jesus is the "first Man" who blazed a trail of faith for us *and* he perfected or brought it to completion, thus "his faithfulness." This he did by enduring the cross, having scorned its shame! The sequence of faith, suffering, death, exaltation, and vindication of faith is similar to Rom 3:21-26, Phil 2:5-11, Heb 5:7-10, and Rom 5:12-19.

⁷ The latest advanced Greek grammar supports this view. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, 1996, pp. 113-116. Wallace concluded: "Although the issue is not to be solved via grammar, on balance grammatical considerations seem to be in favor of the subjective gen. view" (p. 116).

Ephesians 4:13 now makes more sense in light of the above: "until we all reach unto the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (my translation). It is possible this is referring to Jesus' faith and knowledge, not our faith in him or knowledge of him. Rather, we Christians need to grow up to be like Christ together--a unity of his faith and his knowledge, becoming a mature person as Christ is, reaching his full stature.

Colossians 2:12 reads in the NIV: "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him *through your faith* in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." While this may very well be the correct reading of the phrase, *dia tes pisteos*, it is also possible to read it differently. "Having been buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are raised again through *the faithfulness* (God's faithfulness?) of the working/operation of God who raised him from the dead."

A similar passage offers another possibility of being more of a reference to Christ's faith[fulness] than our faith in him. 2 Timothy 3:15 in the NIV reads: "and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In the Greek text the article comes after the noun, *pisteos*, and thus it is pointing out where that "faith" is located--"in Messiah Jesus." Thus, my translation would read: "the ability to make you wise unto salvation through faith[fulness] which [is found] in Messiah Jesus." I do not press this text because it does make sense to read it: "through faith which [is] in Messiah Jesus," meaning Timothy's faith in Jesus the Messiah. That may be the meaning here.

Mark 11:22 is usually translated, "Have faith in God" (*echete pistin theou*). But it could just as easily be translated: "Reckon upon God's faithfulness!" In fact, this translation is what started D.W.B. Robinson's own thoughts about the "subjective genitive" when, as a schoolboy, he had given an autograph book to a visiting preacher to sign. In it he wrote three Greek words, *echete pistin theou*, and rendered them, "Reckon on God's fidelity." Later, when Robinson became a New Testament scholar, he began a serious study of such a translation with the phrases such as *pistis Iesou Christou* in Pauline writings. It also accords well with the Hebrew mind-set of emphasizing the faithfulness of God in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In the same way James 2:1 can be understood. "My brothers, never hold to the faithfulness of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ [while at the same time] in showing favoritism!" (my translation). The NIV reads: "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." Either way is possible.

Revelation 2:13 suggests in the phrase, *ten pistin mou* ("the faith of me"), Christ's faithfulness. The NIV has "your faith in me" but "your" is not in the Greek text. Again, it is supplied because the translators opted for the objective genitive for the pronoun and considered the article before *pistin* as "possessive."

Context in terms of Greek structure helps support my thesis. The following two examples demonstrate a parallel structure which militates against the objective genitive interpretation and supports the subjective.

The Greek text of Rev 14:12 reads: *hoi terountes tas entolas tou theou kai ten pistin Iesou*. Note the structure. After the present participle, "the ones who keep," are two direct objects joined by *kai* and each followed by genitive phrases. There is no doubt the first phrase should be translated "the commandments of God," and the structure suggests that the second phrase should be understood in the same manner, "the faith[fulness] of

Jesus." The NRSV seems compelled to accept this structure by its translation: "Those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (with a footnote "Or to their faith in"). However, the NIV consistently keeps the objective genitive interpretation by rendering the phrase: "who keep God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." At best this strains the parallel structure of the direct objects: "God's commandments and Christ's faith[fulness]."

The second example is found in 1 Peter 1:2. The NIV renders this verse: "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood." The Greek text seems to be violated both by structure and grammar with the NIV. First, note the structure. The verse is a typical apostolic Trinitarian formula in an introductory statement. Peter is saying something about each of the Persons of the Trinity using different prepositions:

"elect ones . . .

kata ("according to") foreknowledge of God [the] Father,

en ("by") sanctifying [work] of [the] Spirit,

eis ("unto, toward the view of") obedience and sprinkling of [the] blood of Jesus Christ.

The Rheims New Testament shows the parallel structure well: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, unto (?) the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." I would translate the middle preposition as "by." The point is most translations in English seem to shy away from any thought of Jesus having "faith" or "being faithful" or "obeying." In this text each prepositional phrase is saying something about the Person of the Trinity. God's foreknowledge, the Spirit's sanctifying work, and Jesus' obedience understood as his shedding of blood on the cross which effects our cleansing from sin. But it is certainly not about *our* obedience and then *His* sprinkling of blood. The genitive of the proper noun, *Iesou Christou*, modifies both nouns in the phrase: *eis hupakoen kai hrantismen haimatos Iesou Christou*. As Francis Agnew observed: "The *eis* phrase (1:2c) is brought into perfect parallelism with the *kata* phrase (1:2a) and the *en* phrase (1:2b) where the 'activity' involved is clearly ascribed to Father and Spirit. All that benefits the elect sojourners is attributed to the 'trinitarian' subjects of the triadic formula."⁸ Thus, it is Jesus' obedience and sprinkling of his blood that has brought salvation to mankind in concert with the Spirit's sanctifying work and God's foreknowledge; i.e., redemption's plan from before the creation (cp. Eph 1:4).

Jesus and Faith

Why have modern English versions of the New Testament been reluctant to recognize that Jesus may have had faith, and consequently at the end of his life to have been faithful (i.e., his faithfulness)? I think the answer lies in part with our view of Jesus' humanity and even the nature of faith itself. As two Catholic scholars, O'Collins and Kendall, have observed, "Any attempt to discuss the faith of the earthly Jesus and reach solidly founded conclusions (either for or against attributing faith to him) requires

⁸ Francis H. Agnew, "1 Peter 1:2 - An Alternative Translation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 70.

reflection in at least three areas: the nature of faith, the question of Jesus' human knowledge, and NT data that bears on claims about Jesus' faith."⁹

(1) On the nature of faith one can get into quicksand. The more you explain the less one may understand. At the risk of doing so, allow me to simply give my view of faith. I take Abraham to be a paradigm for faith. Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 when he wrote: "But Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to him unto righteousness" (Rom 4:3, my translation). Later in this same book Paul makes a reasonable argument that he has been sent to preach the gospel. When people hear this gospel, they are capable of believing it, and therefore they call upon the name of the Lord for salvation (see Rom 10:14, 15). Faith includes knowledge, knowledge about God in Abraham's case and knowledge about the gospel in the case of all of us since Pentecost. Faith also includes assent, saying "Yes!" to the content of faith. But having content to one's faith and saying "yes" to it is still not enough. James talks about this one-dimensional kind of faith when he wrote: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder" (Jas 2:19). The third ingredient of faith is "trust." Most church doctrinal positions on faith would agree that genuine faith includes knowledge, assent, and trust. I prefer to treat "trust" as "obedience," as Paul expresses it: "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5:16:26). Genuine faith must include obedience (Jas 2:14-26).

My view is that all human beings, no matter how corrupt or sinful, can respond to the gospel by faith. Admittedly, that is an "Arminian" position, but I believe it whatever position it may be because I believe it to be biblical. On the other hand, I do not rule out the Spirit's work in convicting the sinner of sin—universally (John 16:8-11).. But to say that means I believe that a person can say "Yes" or "No" to the Spirit's promptings. What I am saying is that faith is not a gift from God. (There is a "measure of faith" that is given to Christians in relationship to spiritual gifts [Rom 12:3]). God desires that all persons be saved and therefore all are capable of responding in faith to God's good news. The doctrine that God must put "faith" in someone's heart in order for that person to be saved is not a biblical teaching. I simply do not see it there. That teaching takes away my free-will to choose to believe or not believe. I suggest that the subjective genitive view of interpretation in our passages above seems to offer support for an Arminian soteriology.

Usually Eph 2:8 is offered as evidence for faith being a gift from God for salvation. In light of the above texts treated as subjective genitives, I see the same for Eph 2:8. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you, [it is] God's gift." The word "this" is neuter, which seems to be referring to the entire phrase: "salvation by grace through faith," not to "faith" (*pisteos*) which is feminine. While the phrase "through faith" may be referring to our faith, I would rather see it as referring to God's faithfulness in his love for us by raising Jesus from the dead. After all, this is the context of the phrase "by grace you have been saved" in vv. 4-6: "But God being rich in mercy, through his great love which he loved us, and while we being dead in trespasses he made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and he raised [us] up and enthroned [us] in the heavenlies in Messiah Jesus" (my translation). Therefore, I see Eph 2:8 as saying: "For by grace you have been saved through [God's, and thus Christ's] faithfulness." Because that is true, Paul easily says: "This is not from (out of)

⁹ Gerald O'Collins, S.J. & Daniel Kendall, S.J., "The Faith of Jesus," *Theological Studies* 53 (Spring, 1992): 405.

you, [it is] God's gift," referring to our salvation. Note: none of my thinking takes away the necessity for our hearing the gospel and responding to it in faith (see Eph 1:13, 14).

(2) The question of Jesus' human knowledge is just as difficult as defining faith. "Aquinas and the subsequent Catholic theological tradition held that in his human mind Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision and hence lived by sight, not by faith."¹⁰ While Protestants may not hold to such a view, for all practical purposes worshipers in the Protestant churches seem to view Christ more as "divine," almost a Gnostic concept, rather than truly human. This is a strong accusation, but after teaching in the local church for over forty years, I am convinced many Christians do not understand Jesus' true humanity. Otherwise, how could Jesus suffer genuinely (Heb 5:7-10) or have free-will to obey or not obey during times of testing (see e.g. Mark 1:12-13; Luke 22:28; Heb 2:18; 4:15). There had to be a limit on the human knowledge of Jesus if he was truly human. True human knowledge grows and develops by experience. Jesus is no exception (e.g. Mark 5:30-32; 13:32). Granted, Jesus manifested great powers, but it was God's power working through the perfect humanity of Jesus. Jesus, however, was conscious of his divine identity as Son of God (Matt 16:16) as well as his destiny in fulfilling God's redemptive mission (Luke 2:49, 50).

In light of this, I share a couple of points N.T. Wright has written bearing on the humanity and divinity of Jesus:

The Christian doctrine of the incarnation was never intended to be about the elevation of a human being to divine status. That's what, according to some Romans, happened to the emperors after they died, or even before. The Christian doctrine is all about *a different sort of God*—a God who was so different to normal expectations that he could, completely appropriately, become human in, and as, the man Jesus of Nazareth. To say that Jesus is in some sense God is of course to make a startling statement about Jesus. It is also to make a stupendous claim about God.¹¹

What I have argued for elsewhere, not to diminish the full incarnation of Jesus but to explore its deepest dimension, is that Jesus was aware of a call, a vocation, to do and be what, according to the scriptures, only Israel's God gets to do and be. That, I believe, is what it means to speak about Jesus being both truly divine and truly human. And we realize, once we remind ourselves that humans were made in God's image, that this is not a category mistake, but the ultimate fulfillment of the purpose of creation itself.¹²

(3) One of the reasons we have difficulty talking about Jesus' faith is that it is not overtly found in the New Testament. The verb "to believe" (*pisteuein*) is found c. 241 times in the New Testament and nowhere does it say "Jesus believed." The noun form "faith" (*pistis*) is found c. 243 times. We have already looked at Paul's eight occurrences

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 407.

¹¹ N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*, (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 52.

¹² N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), p. 118.

of the phrase "faith of Christ," which I have translated "the faithfulness of Christ." One NT reference does refer to the "faith of Jesus" in the NRSV: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12, See our comments above.). We have already noted in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus is the "pioneer and perfecter of the faith," which, in my mind, cannot be true unless Jesus himself practiced a life of faith himself, which at the end of his earthly life could be termed "his faithfulness." Attention, in light of this, should be given to Heb 5:7-8: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered." The author of Hebrews takes seriously Jesus' humanity and seems to describe an *obedient faith* on Jesus' part, though the word "faith" is not used (see Heb 2:17, 18; 4:15). But "faith" is used as part of an inclusion surrounding the great chapter on faith (Heb 11). In the exhortation before Heb 11 the author quotes Hab 2:3, 4 (LXX) in such a way that it applies to the Messiah by saying: "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him" (Heb 10:37, 38). "My righteous one" is Jesus who lived by faith! Then the author of Hebrews began his chapter on faith with a definition of faith: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb 11:1). On the other side is Heb 12:2 about which Attridge commented: "it is neither Christ himself nor his followers . . . that are perfected, but that faith that both share." Additionally he says that the faith which Christ *pioneered and perfected* is "the fidelity and trust that he himself exhibited in a fully adequate way and that his followers are called upon to share."¹³

In the Gospels Jesus is presented as the "Perfect Son" (True Israel; cp. Matt 2:15) totally committed and obedient to a God he called *Abba*, "Father" (Mk 14:36). Once when Jesus was teaching his disciples about sin and forgiveness, they cried out, "Increase our faith!" They were overwhelmed by his teaching. But Jesus' reply was simply to teach them about what a little bit of faith could do: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Lk 17:5, 6). When the disciples could not heal a spirit-possessed mute boy, Jesus chided them for their lack of faith: "O unbelieving generation, . . . how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me" (Mk 9:19). When the boy's father also exhibited a lack of faith by saying, "if you can," Jesus responded: "If you can? . . . Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mk 9:23). Then Jesus immediately healed the boy by casting out the evil spirit. When the disciples asked why they couldn't do that, Jesus replied: "This kind can come out only by prayer" or perhaps "prayer and fasting" (Mk 9:29; cp. Matt 17:19, 20). In Matthew's version Jesus replied: "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there; and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20). This story seems to suggest that Jesus had that kind of faith and that kind of prayer life. By contrast the disciples have "little faith" (Matt 6:30; Lk 12:28). In a storm on the sea of Galilee the disciples wake Jesus up in a panic and Jesus' reply is: "You of little faith, why are you so afraid" (Matt 8:26). Then he proceeded to calm the storm. When Peter attempted to *walk on water*, he

¹³ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), p. 356.

observed the wind, waves, became afraid, and began to sink. Jesus caught him by the hand and said: "You of little faith, . . . why did you doubt?" (Matt 14:30, 31). All of these passages seem to present Jesus speaking about faith as if he is an insider.

One of the earmarks of faith is the prayer life of the disciple. So it is with Jesus. His prayer life was impeccable (see Mk 1:35; 6:46; 14:12-26, 32-42; Matt 11:25; Lk 3:21). "Praying like that expressed a deep sense of dependence and trust—in other words, a strong relationship of faith in God."¹⁴

Conclusion

The above texts reveal that it is possible to talk about the "faith of Jesus." Certainly no one would disagree that we can express many of such phrases as the "faithfulness of Jesus," demonstrated by his death on a cross (Rom 3:25). As Christopher Wright has written: "As the representative or embodiment of Israel, he [Jesus] was called to obedience. . . . His obedient sonship fulfilled the mission which their sonship had prepared for but had failed in disobedience."¹⁵

If we talk about Jesus' faith, we must distinguish his faith from our faith in some way, even his contemporaries' faith. But Jesus affirmed the known creeds of the Hebrew Scriptures expressed in terms of the *Shema* (see Mk 12:28-34; cp. Deut 6:4). The Jewishness of Jesus must not be slighted. "An analogous approach to the content of faith allows for similarities and differences between the faith of devout Jews, Jesus' faith, and subsequent Christian faith."¹⁶

The Apostle Paul seems to have placed in the mouth of Jesus a word from a psalm when he wrote to the Corinthians: "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence" (2 Cor 4:13, 14; cp. Ps 116:10). If this is true, Paul is saying that he, too, shares in this faith that speaks out for God's great salvation evidenced by the resurrection of Jesus and eventually all believers!

God is faithful! Jesus is faithful! Will He find us faithful?

¹⁴ Op. cit., O'Collins & Kendall, p. 417.

¹⁵ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (IVP, 1992), p. 132.

¹⁶ Op. cit., O'Collins & Kendall, p. 421.