

From Faith to Faith

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Born in Sutherland, Scotland in 1898, John Murray was educated at Dornoch Academy and, after service in France in World War I, at the University of Glasgow. A decision to prepare for the Christian ministry took him to Princeton Theological Seminary for three years in 1924. Thereafter, while studying in Edinburgh, he was invited by Caspar Wistar Hodge, Professor of systematic Theology at Princeton, to join him as assistant in 1929. He thus entered directly into the succession of the Hodges and Warfield. On account of the struggle then taking place between historic Christianity and Liberalism in the Presbyterian church in the USA, Princeton Seminary was passing through the greatest upheaval in its history and the outcome was that in 1930 Murray followed Gresham Machen, O.T. Allis and R.D. Wilson to the newly-formed Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Here he was to teach systematic theology to successive generations of Students until his retirement in 1966.

More recently Gabriel Hebert in an article "Faithfulness' and 'Faith'" in *Theology* (Vol. LVIII, No.424, Oct. 1955, pp. 373-379) maintains that, in accord with the meaning of *emunah* in the Old Testament, *pistis* should be understood in several instances in the New Testament as referring, not to our faith, but to the faithfulness of God and of Christ. Hence in Rom. 1:17 "from faith to faith" is to be interpreted as meaning "from the faithfulness of God to man's faith". Likewise in Rom. 3:22 the expression, "through the faith of Jesus Christ", is to be interpreted as referring to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. He applies the same interpretation to such passages as Rom. 3:26; Gal. 2:16; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9; Col. 2:12.

Thomas F. Torrance, on the basis of a more extensive study of Old Testament terms, propounds the same thesis and applies this same interpretation to such passages as Rom. 1:17; 3:22; Gal. 2: 16, 20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9 (*The Expository Times*, Vol. LX VIII, No. 4, Jan. 1957, pp. 111-114, under the title, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith"). Torrance maintains, however, that "in most of these passages *pistis Iesou Christou* does not refer only either to the faithfulness of Christ or to the answering faithfulness of man, but is essentially a polarized expression denoting the faithfulness of Christ as its main ingredient but also involving or at least suggesting the answering faithfulness of man" (p. 113).

These are stimulating articles. The criticism offered in the succeeding pages is not to be interpreted as due to any lack of appreciation of the significance of the

usage of the Old Testament in respect of those terms which so closely bear upon the meaning of faith in both Testaments. Both Hebert and Torrance bring to the forefront all-important considerations. The conclusions which are herewith presented are simply those which, in the esteem of the writer, examination of the evidence constrains. On the central question as it pertains to such passages as Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; Phil. 3:9 the thesis propounded by Hebert and Torrance does not appear to me to derive support from the passages concerned nor from other relevant New Testament data. The study that follows is largely oriented against the presentation of Torrance, and the charge of confusing a polarized situation with a “polarized expression” applies not to Hebert — he does not employ this latter expression nor is it entirely clear that he would have endorsed the use of it, though in one paragraph he may have the same thought in mind (p. 378).

It is quite true that *pistis* is used to denote the faithfulness of God. There happens to be only one instance in the New Testament where this is patent (Rom. 3:3). But it is so perspicuous in this instance and *pistos* is used so often with reference to God (I Cor. 1:9; 10:13; II Cor. 1:18; I Thess. 5:24; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23; I Pet. 4:19; I John 1:9) that there is no reason why *pistis* should not designate the faithfulness of God in other passages where this denotation is not as patent as in Rom. 3:3 but where contextual considerations would favour this interpretation. Likewise, though *pistis* does not expressly denote the faithfulness of Christ in any passage, yet *pistos* is frequently enough predicated of him (II Thess. 3:3; Heb. 2:17; 3:2; Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11) and there is no reason why “the faith of Jesus” should not refer to his faithfulness.

Furthermore, there need be no doubt but the faithfulness of God and of Christ are brought to bear upon our justification, and there is a variety of respects in which this could be conceived of as true and relevant. For example, if God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (I John 1:9), surely the same may be said of our being justified. And if the obedience of Christ is our justification (Rom. 5:19), this obedience cannot be divorced from his faithfulness to the commission and commandment of the Father. Hence if, in Rom. 1:17, *pistews* is taken to refer to the faithfulness of God, there would be nothing *per se* contrary to Paul’s teaching in such an interpretation, or if, in Rom. 3:22, *dià pistews* is taken of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ this could readily be seen to be consistent with the general teaching of Paul respecting the place which the obedience or righteousness of Christ occupies in our justification. In addition, this interpretation would resolve the difficulty of the apparently unnecessary duplication if “faith” is regarded in both instances in both passages as referring to our faith in Christ, the difficulty which has given so much trouble to commentators and on which diversity of interpretation has arisen.

Moreover, there need be no question but the correlativity of God’s faithfulness and our “answering faithfulness”, to use Torrance’s expression, obtains in the matter of justification, and, should sometimes be a “polarized expression”

denoting both ingredients, there would be nothing intrinsically objectionable to such a supposition. Our faith is indeed the answer to God's faithfulness and to the faithfulness of Christ.

The question is not then whether in these passages, to which appeal is made, the view that *pistis* refers to the faithfulness of God or of Christ would be incompatible with biblical doctrine or with Pauline doctrine in particular but whether this finding is borne out by the pertinent New Testament data. It is to this question that we must now address ourselves. In the nature of the case we shall be largely concerned with Paul's usage.

I. First of all it is necessary to adduce those passages in which *pistis* is obviously faith on our part and cannot mean the faithfulness of God. In Rom. 1:8 it is quite obvious that it is the faith of the believers in Rome that is in view. And the same must also be true in the following instances: Rom. 14:1, 22, 23; I Cor. 2:5; 12:9; 13:2, 13; 15:14, 17; II Cor. 1:24; 10:15; Gal. 5:6, 22; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 2:17; I Thess. 1:3,8; 3:2,5,6,7, 10; II Thess. 1:3, 4; 3:2; I Tim. 1:5, 19; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; II Tim. 1:5; 2:18, 22; Tit. 2:10; Phm. 5, 6; Heb. 4:2; 6:1; 11:1, 3, 4, 5, *passim*; James 1:3, 6; 2:5, *passim*; I Pet. 1:7; II Pet. 1:1, 5; I John 5:4; Rev. 2:19; 13:10. This is not an exhaustive list nor does it include other instances with which we shall deal presently where the same import appears. But these instances are selected to show the frequency with which *pistis* appears in the sense of that exercise of heart and mind on our part directed to God or Christ and as instances to which the notion of the faithfulness of God cannot be attached as an ingredient in the term itself.

II. The next classification is that of those instances of *pistis* where some contextual consideration, particularly that of contrast with works, makes it apparent that the activity on the part of the human subject is the activity specifically in view. One of the most significant passages in this group is Rom. 4 where Paul appeals to Gen. 15:6 in order to vindicate justification by faith in contrast with justification by works. Verses 3 and 4 indicate the crux of Paul's argument. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness" (vs. 4). It is Abraham's *believing* in God that is in the forefront as demonstrating justification by grace in contrast with one of debt on the basis of working (*cf.* vs. 4). The faith (*pistis*) that is in view throughout (vss. 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20) is therefore the faith which Abraham placed in God. This is confirmed, if confirmation were required, by the constant interchange in this passage of the verb "believe" for the substantive "faith". "But to him that worketh not but believeth upon him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (vs. 5; *cf.* also vss. 3, 11, 17, 18, 24). Now that believing has reference exclusively to faith as exercised by Abraham and by those who walk in the footprints of his faith needs no demonstration. Hence *pistis* in this passage cannot be understood to include in its connotation the faithfulness of God, although it was preeminently to the faithfulness and power of God that Abraham's faith was directed. It would be not only contrary to the sustained

appeal to Abraham's believing but also contrary to the nature of this believing to include within its definition that of which God himself is specifically the agent. The same considerations bear upon the interpretation of *pistis* in Gal. 3:2-14.

If in these passages the contrast with working and the emphasis placed upon the activity of believing fix for us the precise import of *pistis* when used in the same contexts, this conclusion bears upon the significance, in these contexts at least, of the expression *ek pistews*. Torrance's contention is concerned to a considerable extent with the significance of *ek pistews*. But in these contexts *ek pistews* cannot reflect on anything more than the faith of Abraham and of those who walk in his footsteps. Concretely, this means that the expression in Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7, 8, 9, 11, 12 must have the same precise and restricted reference as *pistis* and *pisteuw* have in these same contexts. And in Rom. 5:1 *ek pistews* cannot be otherwise interpreted in view of the preceding context.

In Rom. 10:3-12 Paul is again dealing with the contrast between the righteousness that is of works of the law and that which is of faith. His argument takes the form of an indictment against Israel that they "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (vs. 3), and then adds that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (vs. 4). This "to every one that believeth" is significant for our present interest because, along with the repeated use of the same term in verses 9, 10, 11, 14, it points to the sense in which we are to understand the term "faith" (*pistis*) in this context. In the expression "the righteousness of faith" (vs. 6) faith must be understood in terms of the exercise of faith on our part and here again we have *ek pistews*. The faithfulness of God cannot, for the same reasons as already indicated, be included in our definition of the term. The same must hold true of the same term in Rom. 9:30, 32 because of the continuity of Paul's argument at these points.

It may not be irrelevant to note that Paul has a distinct preference for the expression *ek pistews* occurs more frequently than any other one form of prepositional construction, particularly in connection with justification. We are compelled to take account of the precise scope attaching to its use in these foregoing contexts and strong presumption is created for this signification throughout the Pauline epistles. It is also worthy of note that in Gal. 3:14 we find *dià pistews* and in this context, for the reasons given, "faith" with this construction must likewise have the same import — it is the faith of *our believing* in God.

III. There are some passages in which faith is said to be *in* Christ Jesus. "For ye are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). "Having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus... I do not cease to give thanks for you" (Eph. 1:15; cf. Col. 1:4). Deacons who have served well purchase to themselves "great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 3:13; cf. II Tim. 1:13). The Scriptures are able to "make wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15). In each of these instances the preposition *en* is used.

In Col. 2:5 where Paul speaks of beholding “the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” the preposition *eis* is used and there can be no doubt but the faith in view is faith directed to Christ on the part of these believers. Christ is the object of the faith in view and not its subject. In these other passages, however, it is possible that the preposition does not indicate the person *to whom* faith is directed but rather the person *in whom* faith has its sphere of operation; faith is exercised in union with Christ. In either case it is the faith exercised by believers that is in view. With the exception of I Tim. 3:13, where it would not be entirely out of the question to think of the faithfulness of Christ, *pistis* in these instances cannot be defined in terms of Christ’s faithfulness nor can the faithfulness of Christ be regarded as an ingredient of that denoted by *pistis*. When the analogy of Col. 2:5 is taken into account and when the usage in respect of the verb *pisteuw* in similar connections is duly weighed (*cf* Matt. 18:6; John 2:11; 3:15, 16, 18 — where *en autoo* in vs. 15 must have the same force as *eis auton* in vss. 16, 18, as far as our present interest is concerned — 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39; 8:30, 31; 14:1; 16:9; Acts 9:42; 10:43; 11:17; 16:31; 18:8; Rom. 4:24; 9:33; 10:11, 14; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 1:29; I Tim. 1:16; II Tim. 1:12; I Pet. 2:6; I John 5:10, 13), there is very good reason to think that in these passages Christ is viewed as the one to whom faith is directed. Besides, this is the more natural interpretation in these contexts (*cf.* especially Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; II Tim. 3:15).

IV. We come now to those passages which offer more plausibility to the contention that *pistis* reflects upon the faithfulness of Christ or of God and includes the same in its connotation. They are those passages where *pistis* occurs in construction with the genitive of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16(2), 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9). To most of these Torrance appeals as instances illustrating his thesis. And the question is whether the genitive in these cases is a genitive of the subject or a genitive of the object. It is admitted, of course, that it could be a genitive of the subject just as the expression “the faith of God” in Rom. 3:3, as found already, is a case of the genitive of the subject. And, furthermore, there need be no question but the faithfulness of Christ is eminently relevant to the subject of justification. The only question is whether this interpretation is borne out by the evidence directly pertinent to the question. The following considerations are to be taken into account.

1. There are several instances in the New Testament where *pistis* occurs in this genitival construction and where the genitive is obviously that of the object. In Mark 11:22 we have the word of Christ to the disciples, *exete pistin theou* — “have faith in God”. Obviously it is the faith that has God as its object. It could possibly be the genitive of source, the faith that proceeds from God. But this is rather far-fetched in the context and, besides, even then it would not be the genitive of the subject. Again in Acts 3:16, “by the faith of his name”, namely, of Jesus, faith must be “faith in his name”. In James 2:1 — “have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons” — the genitive is just as clearly as in Mark 11:22 not that of the subject. In both passages it is the faith we entertain or exercise that must be in view. In Rev. 2:13 — “thou hast not denied my faith” —

the genitive could conceivably be that of the subject — “thou hast not denied my faithfulness”. But this rendering is artificial and there is nothing to support it. It is most probable that “faith” is used here in the objective sense of the word of faith, the truth of the gospel, as frequently in the New Testament. If faith is used in the sense of faith in exercise, then, of course, the genitive is that of the object and the clause means “thou hast not proved unfaithful to thy faith in me”. But in any event there is no warrant for thinking of the genitive as that of the subject. In Rev. 14:12 — “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” — “faith” is no doubt used again in the sense of the gospel believed, the message concerned with Jesus. If “faith” is the subjective exercise, then the genitive is that of the object. But, in any case, the interpretation “the faithfulness of Jesus” does not in the least comport with the sense — we do not keep the faithfulness of Christ. We keep faith with Jesus or we keep the faith (II Tim. 4:7). The latter is the more suitable alternative here. We thus see that in none of these passages is the genitive of the subject apparent. In only one instance is it possible but even in this case it would be artificial and arbitrary. Therefore it is not borne out in any and it is positively ruled out in all but one. These instances are, furthermore, the closest parallels in the New Testament to the other passages which we are now considering, namely, Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9. If the closest parallels do not offer any support to the view in question, namely, that the genitive is the genitive of the subject, there are two observations necessary. First, analogy creates no presumption in favour of the interpretation in question. Second, analogy provides the strongest support for the view that the genitive is that of the object, namely, that “the faith of Jesus Christ” is faith in him. To say the least, the way is wide open for this interpretation in Rom. 3 : 22, 26, *etc.*

2. Torrance does not appeal to Eph. 3:12 in the article concerned. Here, however, we have a construction which is identical with that of the other passages — “in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through the faith of him” (Christ Jesus our Lord). If the faithfulness of Christ is reflected on in the other passages, it would be reasonable to assume the same here also. And, ostensibly, to think of the faithfulness of Christ in this case is not out of the question. But there are exegetical reasons for regarding the genitive here as that of the object, namely, faith in Christ. The strongest consideration is that of the near parallel in Rom. 5:2. There Paul says, referring to Jesus Christ, “through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand”. The faith mentioned here is undoubtedly our faith in Christ. In Eph. 3:12 we should expect the faith mentioned to be the same as in Rom. 5:2. Again, the stress which falls upon boldness, access, and confidence in Eph. 3:12 would require allusion, in terms of Paul’s thinking, to that faith in Jesus upon which so much emphasis is placed elsewhere. And when we find “faith” expressly mentioned, every consideration points to the conclusion that the faith indispensable to confidence and access is precisely that intended. Hence in Eph. 3:12, to say the least, the balance of considerations favour the genitive of the object and so this passage also offers no support to the interpretation with which we are concerned.

3. When we turn to the passages in question we find no evidence in the contexts to support the supposition that the faithfulness of Christ is contemplated. On the contrary there are considerations which point to the more generally accepted interpretation. In Rom. 3:22, 26, what “faith” is being dealt with in the context? In this whole passage (vss. 21-31), apart from the two occurrences in question in verses 22, 26, faith is mentioned six times. It is sufficient to appeal to verse 28 — “therefore we reckon that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” — to show that faith here is our faith in contrast with works. And surely this import and this alone appears in the other five instances — no argument is needed to prove this. For what reason then may we insist that in verses 22, 26 “faith” means the “faithfulness” of Jesus? Furthermore, the sustained appeal in the following chapter to the faith of Abraham, in support of justification by *faith* in contrast with *works*, fixes for us the definition of the “faith” with which the whole argument of the apostle from 3:21 to 5:11 is so much concerned. We found also that the passages where the same kind of construction appears (Mark 11:22; Acts 3:16; James 2:1; Rev. 2:13; 14:12), so far from requiring an interpretation in terms of a genitive of the subject, point definitely in the other direction. If then analogy does not support a genitive of the subject but rather that of the object and if the context of Rom. 3:22, 26 has plainly in view faith as directed to God or Christ, the case is such that there is no evidence to substantiate another view of the “faith” mentioned in these two verses nor is there any evidence to suppose that the “faithfulness” of Christ is an ingredient belonging to the definition of the “faith” which the apostle has in view.

When we turn to Gal. 2:16 we find that the same considerations which have been discussed already bear directly upon the interpretation of the two expressions occurring in this verse, namely, “the faith of Jesus Christ” and “the faith of Christ”. It will suffice to be reminded that in this immediate context the apostle is again arguing the antithesis between justification by works and that by faith — “knowing that a man is not justified from works of law, but through the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified from the faith of Christ and not from works of law”. What is true in the case of Rom. 4 is surely true here also, namely, that it is faith after the pattern of Abraham’s faith in the Lord that provides the antithesis to justification by works. In addition, when Paul says, “even we have believed in Christ Jesus”, we have no warrant to assume that any other faith than the faith thus defined is in view in the other two references to faith. And it is by no means superfluous for Paul to say, “even we have believed in Christ in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ”. It is not superfluous because what Paul is insisting upon here is that we have believed in Christ for no other reason more specifically or relevantly than that we might be justified, and in order to drive home his emphasis it is necessary, because of the complete exclusion of works, to say not only “we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified” but also “that we might be justified by faith”. That is to say, we have believed in Christ for this reason that it is by such faith we are justified. Thus in Gal. 2:16 as well as in Rom. 3:22, 26 we find the case to be such that not only is there no evidence in favour of the

interpretation in question; exegetical considerations militate against it and point to the view that here likewise we have a genitive of the object.

It is not necessary to deal specifically with the other instances (Gal. 2:20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9) other than to observe that similar considerations can be adduced in these instances as have been pleaded in connection with Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16. A glance at Phil. 3:9 will show this to be the case. And with reference to Gal. 2:20 the rather unusual construction, “the faith which is of the Son of God”, offers no evidence in support of the thesis in question. If, as we found, this genitival construction elsewhere does not favour this view but rather a genitive of the object and if in I Tim. 3:13; II Tim. 3:15 the expression, “faith which is in Christ Jesus”, can refer to the faith of which Christ is the object, then there is every good reason to interpret Gal. 2:20 as referring to the faith which is directed to the Son of God.

V. With reference to Rom. 1:17 and the expression “from faith to faith”, it should be apparent that, if the foregoing conclusions are valid, there is no good reason for maintaining that in this instance *ek pistews* must refer to the faithfulness of God. We have found that *pistews* is a favourite Pauline expression to denote the faith of the believer as directed to God or Christ. Hence the expression of itself provides no presumption in favour of the meaning “the faithfulness of God”. On the contrary, usage favours reference to the faith exercised by the believer. Our findings with respect to Rom. 3:22 are particularly relevant to Rom. 1:17. As has been shown in the exposition at these points, there is every good reason why in Rom. 3:22 Paul should have used the formula “through faith of Jesus Christ unto all who believe” in order to emphasize both aspects of truth, namely, that it is by faith we are justified and that justification takes place wherever there is faith. In like manner in Rom. 1:17 it is appropriate that this same emphasis should appear. It is but the reiteration of what is implicit in Rom. 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation “to every one that believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek”.

VI. It may be objected that the foregoing detailed argument is irrelevant because the thesis being controverted is not interested in denying that *pistis*, in the instances concerned, reflects on the faith of the believer but maintains simply that *pistis* is a “polarized expression” comprising both elements, the faithfulness of Christ and the answering faith of the believer. Hence, merely to demonstrate the latter is beside the point, for its presence is not denied. In answer a few observations should suffice.

1. It is fully admitted that wherever there is faith there is always the faithfulness of God and of Christ to which that faith is directed and from which it takes its origin. In other words, faith always involves this *polarized situation*. This is not, therefore, in question.

2. The examination of the evidence has shown, we believe, that what is reflected on in the passages concerned is the faith that is directed to Christ, if we may use the expression, *pistis eis Christón* or *en Christoo*. Now, faith that is directed to Christ cannot *consist* in any respect in the faithfulness of Christ himself. *This* faithfulness resides entirely in Christ as the one to whom faith is directed and it is confusion to inject into the faith itself the faithfulness which belongs to the person to whom the faith is directed and in whom it rests. Therefore, once it is demonstrated that the faith of the believer is reflected on in the passages concerned, that means that the faithfulness of Christ is not *included* in the faith that is reflected on. In other words, it is one thing to say that our faith always involves a *polarized situation*; it is another thing altogether to say that *faith* is a *polarized expression*. It is this confusion that the argument has sought to expose.

3. If faith in these instances is a “polarized expression”, how can this hold true in instances like Rom. 1:17; 3:22? For, in the premises, surely *ek pistews* in the former case refers to the faithfulness of God and *eis pistin* to the faith of men. And in the latter case *dià pistews* refers to the faithfulness of Christ and *eis pantas tous pisteuontas* to the faith of men. The polarized situation would indeed be covered by the respective formulae. But in no instance would the term *pistis* itself be a *polarized expression* — in one instance it would refer to God’s or Christ’s faithfulness and in the other to the *faith* of man, but in no instance to both at the same time.

We can only conclude, therefore, that the thesis in question is not supported by the evidence and that, so far from contributing to a better understanding of the meaning of *pistis*, it confuses a polarized situation (in which our *pistis* is one of the factors) with a polarized expression.