

*Birmingham Theological Journal*  
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary  
Volume 3 | Issue 1 | Article 2 | Dec. 2025

---

## **Christ-Faith and Torah-Works:**

### **Instruments in the Hands**

### **of the Justifying God**

Johnathan F. Harris

**Abstract:** The contrast Paul draws between “Christ-faith” (πίστις Χριστοῦ) and “Torah-works” (ἔργα νόμου), along with their relationship to justification, has been the subject of much debate among Paul’s interpreters. Many have suggested the juxtaposition distinguishes two different forms of human activity: doing versus believing. Others have understood Paul to distinguish between some form of divine activity, on the one hand, and human activity, on the other. Neither of these approaches have fully apprehended Paul’s meaning. Careful consideration of Paul’s argument concerning justification—in particular the fact that God is the subject and agent of the act of justifying—suggests that Paul contrasts neither divine and human activity nor two human acts. Rather, he contrasts Christ-faith and Torah-works as two *divine* acts. His question is not vaguely, “How are God’s people justified?” but more precisely, “In what way has God, in history, actually justified his people?” These two—Christ-faith and Torah-works—function in Paul’s argument as the terms of the argument, as alternative alleged instruments by which a person might think that God justifies his people. The latter represents the position of Paul’s opponents, which he patently rejects; the former is the very gospel for which Paul so vehemently contends.

### **Recommended Citation**

Harris, Johnathan F. “Christ-Faith and Torah-Works: Instruments in the Hands of the Justifying God.” *Birmingham Theological Journal* 3, no. 1 (Dec. 2025): 22–38.

If this article is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

## Introduction

In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Martin Luther infamously described faith as “a divine work in us.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, John Calvin designates faith as the “principal work” of God by the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> While the Reformers have often been critiqued—with or without justification—for their lack of attention to many of the precise historical, cultural, and theological issues at work in the apostle’s discourse, they seem correct on at least this point: Christ-faith (πίστις Χριστοῦ) comes from God. Christ-faith is not simply the means by which God’s people are justified; it is, more precisely, the means by which God Himself justifies His people. Yet, additionally, it is the contention of this essay that “Torah-works” (ἔργα νόμου) must be read in Paul’s argument as the alternative, contrasting viewpoint that functions in parallel to Christ-faith, though of course with the key difference that Paul rejects it. That is, rather than emphasizing human doing of the law *per se*, Paul’s argument assumes a view of Torah-works—the view of his opponents—that suggests Israel’s Torah is the *God-given means* for justification.<sup>3</sup> Though this would inevitably involve human doing of the law—hence his criticism that despite having the law Israel has *not* performed actions in accordance with the Torah (Gal. 6:13; Rom. 2:17–29)—his emphasis lies on divine agency in justification and the means through which God has in fact, in history, justified his people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, introduction to *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.4, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 351. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.33–35, trans. Beveridge, 377–79.

<sup>3</sup> By “parallel” in the previous sentence, both Christ-faith and Torah-works are not meant as equally legitimate means of justification for Paul, only that they function in Paul’s argument in parallel as two alternative, mutually exclusive means by which God might be thought to justify.

The contrast between Christ-faith and Torah-works is one of the central features of Paul’s argument concerning justification, appearing in both Galatians and Romans, as well as in the brief treatment of the topic in Philippians 3:9. Paul asks whether a person is justified through Christ-faith or through Torah-works, arguing for the former over the latter. He begins his entire positive argument in Galatians by posing this single, seemingly all-important question to his “foolish” and “bewitched” audience: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of law or the hearing of faith?”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in his charged rhetoric he avows this is the *only* thing he wants to know from them (Gal. 3:2). His tone suggests that this one question is enough to solve the debate. However, in contemporary Pauline scholarship, the precise nature of this contrast between (Christ-)faith and Torah-works has been the subject of much debate. Many understand Paul’s dichotomy as a contrast between two human actions: on the one hand, *doing* the works prescribed in the law of Moses; on the other hand, *believing* the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Others have understood Paul’s contrast to lie between human and divine activity—Torah-works denoting the former, Christ-faith the latter.<sup>6</sup> Somewhat ironically, this group would include those who, like the Reformers, understand “faith in Christ” to be a gift from God as well as those among

---

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations of the Bible are the author’s own. On the relationship of the Spirit to justification, see Heung-Sik Choi, “The Law and the Spirit in Galatians: Antithetical Basis of Justification,” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 42 (2005): 75–96.

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 134–35; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 154; Sam K. Williams, “The Hearing of Faith: ΑΚΟΗ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ in Galatians 3,” *New Testament Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1989): 86; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 212.

<sup>6</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 286–89; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 176–77; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in vol. 9 of *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 1081–82; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 130.

contemporary scholars who interpret Christ-faith as a reference to the “faithfulness of Christ.” For present purposes, the precise meaning of either “Christ-faith” or “Torah-works”—subjects of their own lengthy debates—is unimportant, as the chosen, relatively neutral translation reflects.<sup>7</sup> The concern of the present essay lies wholly with the *function* of these two in relation to justification, regardless of their specific content.

In contrast to both aforementioned approaches, this essay proposes that with his juxtaposition of Christ-faith and Torah-works Paul intends to contrast neither two human actions nor divine and human activity, but rather two alleged *divine* actions: God’s provision in history of eschatological faith, on the one hand, and the Mosaic Torah, on the other. More specifically, Paul intends for these two—Christ-faith and Torah-works—to function as the terms of the argument, as alternative alleged instruments by which a person might think that God justifies his people. The latter represents the position of Paul’s opponents, which he patently rejects; the former is the very gospel for which Paul so vehemently contends. The argument is simple. First, justification is an act of God; He is the subject and agent of the activity called “justifying.” Second, the prepositions “through” (διὰ) and “by/from” (ἐκ), which govern Christ-faith and Torah-works, denote means—the instrument by which God will justify—rather than basis. Finally, a reflection on Paul’s use of these and related terms corroborates Paul’s meaning and provide fruit for further reflection on Paul’s theology.

---

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these phrases, see Johnathan F. Harris, *Christ-faith and Abraham in Galatians 3–4: Paul’s Tale of Two Siblings*, Biblical Interpretation Series 214 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 9–18, 33–43, 47–60. The debate on the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ has been particularly fierce over the last couple of decades. As the dust has settled, two main positions have emerged: the objective genitive reading (“faith in Christ”) and the subjective genitive reading (“faith/faithfulness of Christ”). More recently, several scholars have advocated versions of a “third view,” some of which boast considerable advantages. See Benjamin Schliesser, “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23–26): A ‘Third View’ on Πίστις Χριστοῦ,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 3 (March 2016): 277–300; Kevin Grasso, “A Linguistic Analysis of πίστις Χριστοῦ: The Case for the Third View,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43, no. 1 (September 2020): 108–44.

### Justification Is an Act of God

The verb δικαιόω (“to justify”) occurs 27 times in Paul’s letters.<sup>8</sup> Twenty of these occur in the passive voice, all of which have humans in view as object of the verb with the exception of two: Romans 3:4 (where God is the object) and 1 Timothy 3:16 (where Christ is the object).<sup>9</sup> Out of his seven uses of δικαιόω in the active voice, Paul denotes God explicitly as the agent of the justifying act in all cases but one (Rom. 4:5).<sup>10</sup> Yet even in this one case, where God’s agency is not technically made explicit, it is nevertheless unquestionable. For Paul the matter is clear: “God is the one who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). He justifies the one who is ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ (Rom. 3:26), whether circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 3:8). Justification is not something that simply happens to believers “in the presence of God” (cf. Gal. 3:11; Rom. 2:13; 3:20). It is an intentional, voluntary *act* of God in the fullest sense of the term, and it has humans as its object.

The above may seem to belabor the obvious, but when the reality that justification is an act of God has its full effect, it becomes obvious that Paul’s eighteen uses of δικαιόω in the passive voice with humans as the object must be read as examples of divine passives. The context in several of these instances makes this exceedingly clear. For example, if taken in isolation, Paul’s reckoning that “a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28) may not seem to imply that God is the justifying agent. However, this statement follows directly upon his designation of God as Him who “justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom.

---

<sup>8</sup> The precise content of the activity named by the verb “to justify” is of little importance for our present purposes. See Harris, *Christ-faith and Abraham*, 65–108.

<sup>9</sup> The 18 occurrences in which a human or humans generally are in view are Gal. 2:16 [3x], 17; 3:11, 24; 5:4; 1 Cor. 4:4; 6:11; Rom. 2:13; 3:20, 24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 6:7; Titus 3:7.

<sup>10</sup> Gal. 3:8; Rom. 3:26, 30; 4:5; 8:30 [2x]; 8:33.

3:26) and directly precedes his further denotation of God as the one who justifies both the circumcised and uncircumcised through the same faith (Rom. 3:30). Therefore, the passive verb in Romans 3:28 must be read as a divine passive. Other verses, though not decisive on their own, can be read in light of the above to further buttress the fact that Paul consistently understands God as the agent in justification. So, for example, to be righteous or justified “before God” (Gal. 3:11; Rom. 2:13; 3:20) can now be seen to mean not simply *in God’s presence* but also, and most emphatically, *by God*, the one who justifies. Paul, therefore, quite consistently denotes God as the agent in the act of justifying.<sup>11</sup>

### The Prepositions Ἐκ and Διά Denote Means

Paul relates God’s act of justifying to the juxtaposed pair of Christ-faith and Torah-works via two prepositions: ἔκ and διά. The former may be translated “by,” “from,” or even “out of,” while the latter is best read “through” or “by means of.” However, in his justification discourses, Paul uses both ἔκ and διά to signify means.<sup>12</sup> In Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:30, and Philippians 3:9, he effortlessly shifts from speaking of justification διὰ πίστεως (“through faith”) to speaking of justification ἐκ πίστεως (“from faith”). Likewise, in Galatians 2:16 and 2:21 he rejects, respectively, the possibility of justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (“from works of law”) and righteousness διὰ νόμου (“through law”).

---

<sup>11</sup> Even in 1 Tim. 3:16, where Jesus Himself is justified, the verb δικαιόω should be read as a divine passive. For if δικαιόω there refers, as many have argued, to Christ’s resurrection, then God Himself is rightly viewed as the one who through the Spirit effects Jesus’s resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor. 4:14; Rom. 6:4; 8:11; Eph. 1:20). See, for example, Peter J. Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 183–86.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, “The Meaning of Πίστις and Νόμος in Paul: A Linguistic and Structural Perspective,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 100–103. See Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 70, 104; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 369, 371.

If we recall that God alone is, for Paul, the agent in the act of justification, then when he uses the prepositions ἐκ and διὰ to signify the means by which God justifies, the prepositions take on the further connotation of instrument. For, as Louw and Nida put it, “the category of *Means* ... involves a relation between two events while the category of *Instrument* includes objects which are employed in some activity or event.”<sup>13</sup> In the relevant prepositional phrases, Christ-faith and Torah-works are the means by which a person is justified. With these phrases, Paul is not simply creating a vague relationship of means between a person and justification. More precisely, Paul envisions Christ-faith and Torah-works as the means by which *God* justifies a person. They become almost a sort of metaphorical object or instrument through which God successfully performs the action of justifying. They are, in effect, alleged instruments in the hands of the justifying God—always keeping in mind the qualification that, though that is how Paul frames the contrast, i.e., as alternative alleged instruments, only Christ-faith represents Paul’s own position.

The prepositions’ instrumental force can be illustrated from Paul’s own discourses. For example, the parallel use of ἐκ πίστεως and διὰ τῆς πίστεως in Romans 3:30 follows right after the instrumental dative πίσται (Rom. 3:28), all three of which are related in context to the act of justifying. In Galatians 3:2, Paul frames the contrast of faith and Torah-works within the question of how the Galatians received the Spirit. Here Paul’s concern is not simply how a

---

<sup>13</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Introduction and Domains*, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 798n2. In the same note, they mention the difficulty sometimes in distinguishing the two. See the similar explanation from Rachel and Michael Aubrey: “The difference between means and intermediary or instrument is primarily based on manipulation. An agent manipulates an intermediary or instrument to achieve a certain state of affairs. But with expressions of means, the landmark is not manipulated by an agent. The landmark means, by its presence, provides the path for achieving an end result.” Rachel Aubrey and Michael Aubrey, *Greek Prepositions in the New Testament: A Cognitive-Functional Description*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020–2021), s.v. “διὰ,” 5. Credit goes to this article’s reviewers for this insight.

person receives the Spirit but specifically by what means *God* has supplied the Spirit (Gal. 3:5). The Galatian agitators believe that Torah is the means by which God will justify His people and bring them into the age to come. Paul, by contrast, argues that it is Christ-faith alone through which God has decisively acted to bring His people from the present evil age into resurrection life.

The use of these prepositions to denote means or instrument should be sharply distinguished from basis, which is signified in Greek by other prepositions. The distinction is subtle but important, for it is all too often lacking when scholars unquestioningly deploy “basis” language in English when discussing Paul.<sup>14</sup> Paul says that God justifies His people *through*, or *by means of*, Christ-faith not Torah-works. He does not argue that God justifies His people *on the basis of* Christ-faith not Torah-works.<sup>15</sup> Charles H. Cosgrove has written a clarifying article on the difference between prepositions of means and basis used with the verb “to justify” (δικαιώω). He demonstrates that when Paul uses the prepositions ἐκ and διὰ with δικαιώω, he “expresses the relationship between justification and works or faith in terms of means or instrumentality, never in terms of juridical or evidential basis,” for which Greek speakers would have used other

---

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Choi, “The Law and the Spirit in Galatians,” 76; James B. Prothro, *Both Judge and Justifier: Biblical Legal Language and the Act of Justifying in Paul*, WUNT 2:461 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 127; R. Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel: Understanding the Contexts and Controversies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 15; Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 59; de Boer, *Galatians*, 142; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 88; Kevin W. McFadden, *Judgment According to Works in Romans: The Meaning and Function of Divine Judgment in Paul’s Most Important Letter*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 152; Joseph B. Tyson, “‘Works of Law’ in Galatians,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (September 1973): 430; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 274; Sam K. Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 2 (June 1980): 269; N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 224.

<sup>15</sup> This is why translating the prepositions as “by” is less helpful and ambiguous at best.



prepositions, such as ἐπί or κατά.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Paul’s consistent use of ἐκ and διὰ to denote means/instrument rather than those prepositions that would signify basis leads Cosgrove to suspect “an *avoidance* of the latter and a special interest in the idea of *instrumentality* in justification.”<sup>17</sup> Precisely speaking, Paul is concerned in these passages with *how* (i.e., in what way, through what means) not *why* (i.e., on what basis) a person is justified.<sup>18</sup> Rather than juxtaposing human believing and human doing, or even divine and human action, Christ-faith and Torah-works are presented as two alternative means by which God might be thought to justify His people. Torah-works are the means proposed by Paul’s opponents, which Paul himself rejects; Christ-faith, Paul argues, is the means that God, according to His gospel, has used to justify His people.

### Christ-faith and Torah-works as “Spheres of Instrumentality”

How can Christ-faith and Torah-works be conceived as instruments in the hands of the God who justifies? Surely this is an odd Pauline concept! It may indeed be, and the confusion among Paul’s interpreters is understandable. Still, an explanation lies close at hand.

Though both prepositions denote means, ἐκ and διὰ carry distinct nuances.<sup>19</sup> Διὰ is the more precisely instrumental preposition and thus draws out the instrumental nuance of ἐκ when

---

<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Cosgrove, “Justification in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Reflection,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 4 (December 1987): 659.

<sup>17</sup> Cosgrove, “Justification,” 658, italics his.

<sup>18</sup> The *basis* of justification, as traditionally conceived in Reformed theology, is Christ Himself.

<sup>19</sup> As in English, one might say a person is justified *by* faith or *through* faith. Though these conceivably denote the same instrumentality, “through,” presents itself as the more “purely” instrumental preposition, whereas “by” could carry other nuances, e.g., agency.

the two are used together.<sup>20</sup> It may be, in fact, that Paul uses διὰ for just this reason since his use of ἐκ πίστεως, which is likely derived from Habakkuk 2:4, would be less clear.<sup>21</sup> Still, as we will now see, Paul may have good reason for retaining the scripturally provided preposition ἐκ.

Though in Romans the evidence is mixed, in Galatians Paul exhibits a clear preference for ἐκ, which he uses not only adverbially but also adjectivally.<sup>22</sup> He refers to οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς (Gal. 2:12), οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (Gal. 3:7, 9), ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (Gal. 3:10), and ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί (Gal. 2:15).<sup>23</sup> Paul uses ἐκ adjectivally to denote a group in terms of its key identifying marker: “the circumcision people,” “the faith people,” and “the Torah-works people.”<sup>24</sup> The question then becomes: what is the relation of the group to its key identifying marker? Are they “faith people” and “Torah-works people” because they exhibit faith or keep Torah, or because they are marked out socially by the badges of faith and Torah? Alternatively, might the relation be best described in other terms?

---

<sup>20</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, “The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Romans 3:22,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 59.

<sup>21</sup> Roy E. Ciampa, “Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians: Rewritings and Snippet Quotations,” in *Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in Galatians and 1 Thessalonians*, ed. A. Andrew Das and B. J. Oropeza, *Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in Paul’s Letters* (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress, 2023), 77–94; Campbell, “Meaning,” 100–102. Campbell has argued convincingly that Paul’s use of ἐκ πίστεως is derived from Hab. 2:4. The phrase appears only in Romans and Galatians—his only epistles that cite Hab. 2:4 explicitly as a significant pillar of his discourse.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Galatians 3:8 contains an adverbial use of the phrase (ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῦ) signaling instrumentality sandwiched between two adjectival, partitive uses of οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (Gal. 3:7, 9). One must exhibit care to establish each use of the preposition without foisting a univocal sense on every occurrence and risking falling prey to the dreaded “denial of double entendre” (Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, 41–43).

<sup>23</sup> Some have even argued that Paul’s reference to ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (Gal. 2:16) should be included among the adjectival uses. See, e.g., Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 106n42; Ardel B. Caneday, “The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ as a Theme in Paul’s Theology in Galatians,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 194–95.

<sup>24</sup> Hays, “Galatians,” 1085; Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 86–87.

Unlike *διὰ*, the preposition *ἐκ* can convey the sense of source or origin.<sup>25</sup> However, Don Garlington has argued that this nuance of source or origin “can entail the notion of *position within* or *participation*; that is, to be ‘from’ (*ἐκ*) a realm means to ‘belong’ to it,” so that “*ἐκ* is not so far removed from *ἐν* in its locative sense.”<sup>26</sup> Garlington can even say that partitive phrases such as *ἐκ πίστεως* (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ and οἱ ἐκ πίστεως are virtually synonymous with the all-important Pauline phrase *ἐν Χριστῷ* (“in Christ”).<sup>27</sup> With his adjectival “partisan *ἐκ*,” Paul denotes those who belong to the realms of Christ-faith (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως) and Torah-works (ὅσοι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου).<sup>28</sup>

Though Garlington’s “partisan *ἐκ*” is insightful for Paul’s adjectival uses of *ἐκ*, he errs slightly when he imposes the nuance of source/origin on Paul’s adverbial uses of *ἐκ* to the *exclusion* of the preposition’s instrumental nuance.<sup>29</sup> For example, he believes the adverbial use in the clause “so that we might be justified from Christ-faith [*ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ*]” (Gal. 2:16) specifies origin *and not* instrument.<sup>30</sup> This, however, cannot be correct, as the parallel phrase *διὰ*

---

<sup>25</sup> Harris, *Prepositions*, 103; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 371–72.

<sup>26</sup> Don Garlington, “Paul’s ‘Partisan *ἐκ*’ and the Question of Justification in Galatians,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 567, italics his.

<sup>27</sup> Garlington, “Paul’s Partisan *ἐκ*,” 589.

<sup>28</sup> Garlington suggests Paul’s “partisan *ἐκ*” is influenced by the Hebrew partitive use of *מֵן* (“Paul’s Partisan *ἐκ*,” 568–70. Benjamin Schliesser critiques Garlington on this point, positing that, since Paul’s use of *ἐκ πίστεως* is derived from Habakkuk 2:4, it is the local or spherical connotations of the preposition *מֵן* rather than *מִן* that stand behind Paul’s use. See Schliesser, “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event,” 288, especially 288n23. These spherical connotations were carried into the translations of Habakkuk 2:4 in Aquila and the early fragments found in Nahal Hever (8HevXIIgr 17.29–30), both of which read *ἐν πίστει* (“Christ-faith,” 288), though it should be noted that in both of these *πίστει* is followed by the pronoun *αὐτοῦ*. Symmachus, similarly, has *ἐν αὐτοῦ πίστει*.

<sup>29</sup> Garlington writes, “Rather than a variation on the theme of instrumentality, *ἐκ* so often in Galatians serves to articulate the notions of source and belonging” (“Paul’s Partisan *ἐκ*,” 587).

<sup>30</sup> Garlington, “Paul’s Partisan *ἐκ*,” 573.

πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ makes clear.<sup>31</sup> Garlington is right that Paul “uses prepositions carefully.”<sup>32</sup> However, he implies that a difference in preposition must mean a difference in meaning and ends up pressing a univocal sense onto every occurrence of ἐκ, neither move of which is advisable or necessary.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, he errs only *slightly* because there remains a sense in which ἐκ maintains its nuance of source even in Paul’s adverbial uses. Here Paul’s interpreters face the ever-present challenge of navigating the underdetermined nature of language and a word’s potential for multivalence when read from different contexts. Jan Lambrecht exhibits the struggle in his own attempt to preserve both the instrumental force of ἐκ and its nuance of source/origin. He writes, “The fourfold repetition of ἐκ [in Gal. 2:16] certainly preserves somewhat the inherent sense of source and origin, but the context shows that both faith and works are considered to be the means of justification.”<sup>34</sup> Certainly, it would be unnecessary to read Paul’s adverbial uses of ἐκ in any way other than instrument except that in Galatians, as Garlington has shown, Paul himself develops his ἐκ-theology in partisan terms. That is, Galatians itself creates a relation between the adverbial and adjectival uses of ἐκ. It is precisely “those from the realm of faith” (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως) who are justified “from/out of faith” (ἐκ πίστεως). This relationship compels the reader to hear the nuance of source and participation echoing even in the instrumental uses of ἐκ. Paul has, indeed, chosen his prepositions carefully, or more likely, Paul finds a preposition thrust upon

---

<sup>31</sup> Jan Lambrecht, “Critical Reflections on Paul’s ‘Partisan ἐκ’ as Recently Presented by Don Garlington,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 85, no. 1 (April 2009): 138.

<sup>32</sup> Garlington, “Paul’s Partisan ἐκ,” 573.

<sup>33</sup> See Harris, *Prepositions*, 40–43.

<sup>34</sup> Lambrecht, “Critical Reflections,” 138.

him from Habakkuk 2:4—“the righteous one shall live from faith [ἐκ πίστεως]”—that he squeezes for all its theological worth.

How, then, may Paul’s claim that God justifies ἐκ πίστεως be related to his description of faith-people as οἱ ἐκ πίστεως? Paul’s partisan ἐκ does not exclude, as Garlington seems to imply, a strong instrumental reading of both διὰ and ἐκ, nor is an instrumental reading of those prepositions at odds with the quasi-spatial, participatory understanding of Paul’s partisan ἐκ. Instrumental and spatial interpretations cohere well because it is precisely by being found *in* Christ, in Christ-faith, that one is justified *through* Christ-faith. The relation between Paul’s adjectival and adverbial uses of ἐκ suggests what might be called *spheres of instrumentality*. That is, God’s means of justifying is a sphere—the sphere of the crucified and risen Christ—in which He causes one to participate through Christ-faith. As Schliesser suggests, even though it is “certainly correct” that ἐκ and διὰ retain a notion of instrumentality, the instrument that is faith “can be said to be incorporated into the ‘spatial-dynamic’ and thus participatory paradigm of Paul’s thinking.”<sup>35</sup> Cosgrove, too, concludes that Paul “views the law or Christ as a soteriological reality or sphere in which justification may be produced. The question never becomes whether one can be justified *on the basis of* the law or works but remains always whether one can be justified in the sphere of the law.”<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

The present study has focused on the function of Christ-faith and Torah-works in relation to the divine subject and human objects in justification. Yet there remains much work to be done,

---

<sup>35</sup> Schliesser, “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event,” 288.

<sup>36</sup> Cosgrove, “Justification,” 662, *italics his*.

to which this essay will hopefully contribute. The precise content of Christ-faith and Torah-works continues to be debated, and the nature of participation in Paul's theology leaves much room in contemporary scholarship for development. An interesting study, considering Paul's quasi-spatial language as articulated in the present essay, could explore the significance and effect of this spatial language in light of recent work on the role of metaphor, especially spatiality, in human cognition.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, for Paul, God is the one who justifies, and He does so precisely through Christ-faith, not Torah-works. These two—Christ-faith and Torah-works—are two mutually exclusive spheres of instrumentality, two realms that represent contested instruments in the hands of the justifying God. For Paul, one is justified *from* or *by participating in the realm of* Christ-faith (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ) and therefore *through* Christ-faith (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ). This is the place where God, in history, has justified His people. Contrary to the claims of Paul's opponents, there is no justification to be found within the realm of, and thus through, the law. Torah simply is not the instrument by which God justifies.

---

<sup>37</sup> For example, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999).

\* I would like to express my gratitude to Patricia Sanders, along with the reviewers and editorial staff, for their gracious and insightful comments, without which the article could not have reached its present form, much improved from the original. Of course, all remaining inadequacies are my own. *S.D.G.*

## Bibliography

- Allen, R. Michael. *Justification and the Gospel: Understanding the Contexts and Controversies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Aubrey, Rachel, and Michael Aubrey. *Greek Prepositions in the New Testament: A Cognitive-Functional Description*. Lexham Research Lexicons. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020–2021.
- Bird, Michael F. *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008.
- Campbell, Douglas A. “The Meaning of Πίστις and Νόμος in Paul: A Linguistic and Structural Perspective.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 91–103.
- Campbell, Douglas A. “The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Romans 3:22.” In *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, edited by Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, 57–71. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010.
- Caneday, Ardel B. “The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ as a Theme in Paul’s Theology in Galatians.” In *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, edited by Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, 185–205. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010.
- Choi, Heung-Sik. “The Law and the Spirit in Galatians: Antithetical Basis of Justification.” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 42 (2005): 75–96.
- Ciampa, Roy E. “Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians: Rewritings and Snippet Quotations.” In *Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in Galatians and 1 Thessalonians*, edited by A. Andrew Das and B. J. Oropeza, 77–94. Lanham: Lexington/Fortress, 2023.
- Cosgrove, Charles H. “Justification in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Reflection.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 4 (December 1987): 653–70.
- de Boer, Martinus C. *Galatians: A Commentary*. New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011.
- Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistle to the Galatians*. Black’s New Testament Commentaries. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993.
- Garlington, Don. “Paul’s ‘Partisan ἐκ’ and the Question of Justification in Galatians.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 567–89.

- Grasso, Kevin. “A Linguistic Analysis of πίστις Χριστοῦ: The Case for the Third View.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43, no. 1 (September 2020): 108–44.
- Harris, Johnathan F. *Christ-faith and Abraham in Galatians 3–4: Paul’s Tale of Two Siblings*. Biblical Interpretation Series 214. Leiden: Brill, 2023.
- Harris, Murray J. *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Hays, Richard B. “The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections.” In *New Interpreter’s Bible*, edited by Leander E. Keck, 9:1019–1173. Nashville: Abingdon, 2015.
- . *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic, 1999.
- Lambrecht, Jan. “Critical Reflections on Paul’s ‘Partisan ἐκ’ as Recently Presented by Don Garlington.” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 85, no. 1 (April 2009): 135–41.
- Leithart, Peter J. *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.
- Lightfoot, J. B. *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *Galatians*. Word Biblical Commentary 41. Dallas: Word, 1990.
- Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Introduction and Domains*. Vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988.
- Luther, Martin. Introduction to *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960.
- Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 33A. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- McFadden, Kevin W. *Judgment According to Works in Romans: The Meaning and Function of Divine Judgment in Paul’s Most Important Letter*. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.
- Prothro, James B. *Both Judge and Justifier: Biblical Legal Language and the Act of Justifying in Paul*. WUNT 2:461. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.



- Schliesser, Benjamin. “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23–26): A ‘Third View’ on Πίστις Χριστοῦ.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 3 (March 2016): 277–300.
- Seifrid, Mark A. *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 9. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Tyson, Joseph B. “‘Works of Law’ in Galatians.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (September 1973): 423–31.
- Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Williams, Sam K. “The Hearing of Faith: ΑΚΟΗ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ in Galatians 3.” *New Testament Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1989): 82–93.
- . “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 2 (June 1980): 241–90.
- . *Galatians*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Wright, N. T. *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.