

The Coming of Faith: Faith Personified in Galatians 3:23–25

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Abstract

Why does Paul talk about πίστις, usually translated as ‘faith’, coming and being revealed in Galatians 3:23–25? The traditional approach saw this referring to the way or era of faith that superseded the law. Numerous scholars, however, have objected that faith was a reality before the coming of Christ, and therefore πίστις must have a different referent. Alternative views have emerged, which variously interpret πίστις in 3:23–25 as Christ, Christ’s faithfulness, both human faith and Christ’s faithfulness, the gospel, or an objective apocalyptic event. Each of these is examined, and each has problems, including linguistic issues, and semantic overloading. Paul sees the coming of faith-in-Christ as an eschatological event. He distinguishes between the era of law and the era of faith, so that faith, and not the law, is what constitutes relationship to God in the new creation. Paul is employing the rhetorical device of personification, common in the ancient world, by which an impersonal entity is granted human characteristics. Scripture, sin, law, and faith are all personified in a grand cosmic drama. This personification, however, does not change the basic identity of the characters. Faith personified is still faith.

1. Introduction

The question before us is the meaning of πίστις, usually translated as ‘faith’, in Galatians 3:23–25:

Now before faith came, we were guarded under the law, confined until the faith which was going to be revealed. So the law was our custodian until Christ, in order that we might be justified by faith. But, now that faith has come, we are no longer under the custodian.¹

1. Translations of ancient sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Difficulties especially attach to verses 23 and 25, where faith is said to ‘come’ or be ‘revealed’. How are these expressions to be understood? Would Paul suggest that there was no faith in Israel before Christ? Paul himself points to Abraham’s prior faith in Galatians 3:6.² A strong strand of scholarship holds that human faith (in Christ) is in view,³ but a growing number argue that πίστις in 3:23–25 means something other than human faith. Several interpretive options have emerged, whether the coming of Christ, or the gospel, or Christ’s faithfulness. Πίστις is mentioned in every verse from 3:22 through 3:26, and so in the absence of a clear signal from the author, a consistent sense for πίστις should be sought.⁴ Though some have acknowledged Paul’s use of personification, this classification has more explanatory value than has hitherto been recognised. Paul is personifying human faith (in Christ).

2. Alternative views

2.1 Πίστις as Jesus Christ

Some scholars claim that πίστις in Galatians 3:23–25 functions as a metonymy for Christ; references to the coming of faith (πίστις) do not point to the coming of faith but to the coming of Christ, building on the phrase εἰς Χριστόν in 3:24, usually translated as ‘until Christ’. According to Moises Silva, ‘Paul must be referring to Christ’, so ‘we should probably understand this use of πίστις as a simple metonymy whereby the word stands for the object of faith.’⁵ For De Boer,

2. Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 198; David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 2018), 325–327, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-0004>; Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Eerdmans, 2020), 174; Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (T&T Clark, 1998), 547–548; Shuji Ota, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: Christ’s Faithfulness to Whom?’, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 55 (2014): 16; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Zondervan, 2010), 245.

3. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Fortress, 1979), 175–176; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (Hendrickson, 1993), 197; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2019), 289, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108642392>; Christopher M. Tuckett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Galatians*, ICC (T&T Clark, 2024), 474–478, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567716422>.

4. As Sprinkle notes. Preston M. Sprinkle, ‘Πίστις Χριστοῦ as an Eschatological Event’, in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Paternoster, 2009), 178.

5. Moises Silva, ‘Faith Versus Works of Law in Galatians’, in *Justification and Variegated Nomism II: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 2/181 (Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 240.

‘the term *pistis* is being used as a metonym for Christ, a particular trait standing for the whole person’, though he holds back from a complete identification of πίστις with Christ. It is ‘a virtual synonym for ‘Christ’, but ultimately refers to Christ’s own faithfulness.⁶ Witherington and Campbell see a close identity between the coming of faith and the coming of Christ. Just as Christ is the seed who comes in 3:16, he is the πίστις who comes in 3:23.⁷ However, the parallel falls down because, while Paul names Christ as the seed of Abraham (3:16), he does not explicitly name Christ as ‘faith’.

Paul is portraying πίστις in apocalyptic terms, as an arriving deliverer, but Campbell is reluctant to attribute such an important role to human faith.⁸ Instead, he sees πίστις in 3:23-25 referring to Christ as ‘the faithful one’.⁹ However, if Paul wanted to entitle Christ ‘the faithful one’, he would likely have used the articular adjective ὁ πιστός rather than the noun πίστις.¹⁰ For Paul, the coming of faith is certainly correlated with the coming of Christ, as Schlatter pointed out: ‘Faith came and was revealed because Christ came and was revealed.’¹¹ But it is not the same thing. Campbell and others deny that Paul is describing the singular coming of faith at a point in time, because of the faith that existed before Christ, especially the faith of Abraham (3:6-9),¹² or because faith is pluralised, i.e. distributed in time and space.¹³ In Galatians, faith seems to jump from Abraham to Christ; the law is ‘not of faith’ (3:12). For Paul,

6. Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, NTL (Westminster John Knox, 2011), 239–240, cf. also Axel von Dobbeler, *Glaube als Teilhabe: historische und semantische Grundlagen der paulinischen Theologie und Ekklesiologie des Glaubens*, WUNT 2/22 (Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 59; Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Fortress Press, 1976), 21.

7. Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1998), 268; Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Eerdmans, 2009), 867–870.

8. Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 351–352, 388–392.

9. Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 882. He reads every instance of πίστις in Galatians as referring to Christ’s faithfulness, or to Christ as ‘the faithful one’ (833–895).

10. Cf. Campbell’s claim that ὁ δίκαιος in Romans 1:17 is a messianic title signifying Christ as ‘the righteous one’. Douglas A. Campbell, ‘Romans 1:17 – A *Crux Interpretum* for the πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate’, *JBL* 113 (1994): 282–285, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3266514>. This position has other weaknesses. See John W. Taylor, ‘From Faith to Faith: Romans 1.17 in the Light of Greek Idiom’, *NTS* 50 (2004): 338–342, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688504000190>.

11. Adolf Schlatter, *Faith in the New Testament: A Study in Biblical Theology*, trans. Joseph Longarino (Lexham Academic, 2022), 297.

12. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 145. The same concern arises if πίστις in Gal 3:23-25 is taken as ‘faithfulness’.

13. Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 879.

Abraham's faith was proleptic,¹⁴ and *therefore* paradigmatic, an anticipation of the faith that was coming with the coming of Christ. He 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', so that 'those who are of faith [οἱ ἐκ πίστεως] are sons of Abraham' (3:6-7, cf. Rom 4:9-12). Note the future orientation of Galatians 3:8, 'And *foreseeing* that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, the scripture *preached the gospel beforehand* to Abraham, saying "In you all the nations *shall be blessed*."'

2.2 Πίστις as Christ's faithfulness

A second approach is to read πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 as Christ's faithfulness. Adherents to the subjective genitive view in the *pistis Christou* debate routinely take ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in 3:22 to mean 'by the faithfulness of Christ'.¹⁵ This reading is usually dependent on the reasonable assumption that the article before πίστις in 3:23 is anaphoric, pointing back to ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in 3:22. It is usually further interpreted to mean Christ's obedience unto death, or similar.¹⁶ Caneday, for example, argues that it is metonymy for 'Christ's faithfulness, answering Israel's unfaithfulness, in his substitutionary role of redeeming us from Israel's curse'.¹⁷ It is this kind of overloading which is perhaps the weakest aspect of the subjective genitive position.

Moreover, the argument in Galatians 3 does not support it. Even if one sweeps up every use of πίστις in Galatians 2 and 3 to signify Christ's faithfulness, one still has to reckon with the verbal forms of πιστεύω in 2:16, 3:6, and 3:22, which point to the faith of Paul, Abraham, and other believers. Though they

14. Schliesser calls Abraham 'the "pre-existent" believer, ... a type of the new people of God' (translation mine). See Benjamin Schliesser, 'Glauben und Denken im Hebräerbrief und bei Paulus: Zwei frühchristliche Perspektiven auf die Rationalität des Glauben', in *Glaube: das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, ed. Jörg Frey, Benjamin Schliesser, and Nadine Ueberschaer, WUNT 373 (Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 547.

15. Only some continue this reading into 3:23-25. De Boer, *Galatians*, 238; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2002), 172, 203; Richard B. Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Abingdon, 2000), 269-270; Ardel Caneday, 'The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ', in Bird and Sprinkle, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 186-187. The NET Bible has 'faithfulness' (of Christ) in 3:22, but 'faith' in 3:23-26.

16. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 292. Ota, 'Faithfulness to Whom?', 24-26, understands it as Christ's faithfulness to human beings. Similarly, David J. Downs and Benjamin J. Lappenga, *The Faithfulness of the Risen Christ* (Baylor University Press, 2019), 100-103, see it as the present faithfulness of the resurrected Christ.

17. Caneday, 'Faithfulness', 203.

are not determinative,¹⁸ the presence of cognates can help to disambiguate meaning.¹⁹ Paul on a number of occasions repeats ideas with combinations of verbal, adjectival, or nominal cognates, probably for the sake of both emphasis and variety, for example, when discussing foolishness and wisdom (μωρία, μωραίνω, and μωρόν, σοφία, and σοφός, 1 Cor 1:18-25); comfort (παράκλησις, παρακαλέω, 2 Cor 1:3-7); joy (χαίρω, χαρά, 2 Cor 2:3); reconciliation (καταλάσσω, καταλαγή, 2 Cor 5:19); gospel (εὐαγγέλιον, εὐαγγελίζω, Gal 1:6-9); curses (κατάρα, ἐπικατάρατος, Gal 3:10-13); desire (ἐπιθυμία, ἐπιθυμέω, Gal 5:16-17); and burdens (βάρος, ἐπιβαρέω, 1 Thess 2:7-9).²⁰ Similarly, Paul frequently uses combinations of πιστεύω and πίστις when discussing faith.²¹

In 3:6, we read ‘just as “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”’. The comparative καθώς (‘just as’) in verse 6 could draw the reader back to the repeated mention of the Galatians’ faith in 3:1-5, or forward to οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (‘those of faith’) in 3:7.²² Either way, the comparison drawn between the noun πίστις and the verb ἐπίστευσεν (‘believed’, 3:6) suggests that

18. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press, 1961), 166.

19. Stanley E. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Baker Academic, 2015), 57; R. Barry Matlock, ‘Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective’, *NovT* 42 (2000): 13–16, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853600506573>. Matlock points out that Paul, in Rom 4:9, uses the noun πίστις in paraphrasing Gen 15:6, where the Greek text he quoted in Rom 4:3 uses the verb πιστεύω.

20. *Contra* Morna D. Hooker, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’, *NTS* 38 (1989): 173, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500016817>, the idea that Paul would not repeat himself to the point of apparent redundancy does not stand up to scrutiny. See Karl Friedrich Ulrichs, *Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma πίστις Χριστοῦ und zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung*, *WUNT* 2/227 (Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 142.

21. Rom 1:16-17; 3:22-30; 4:2-5,11; 4:16-5:1; 14:1-2; Gal 2:16; 3:6-9; 2 Cor 4:13. Sometimes he adds other cognates such as ἀπιστία (‘unbelief’, Rom 4:20).

22. The majority of the eighty-eight instances of καθώς in Paul are clearly anaphoric, introducing a comparison to something already mentioned. Fourteen are cataphoric, signalled by subsequent terms such as correlated adverbs (‘just as ... in the same way’, 2 Cor 1:5; 8:6; 10:7; Col 3:13; 1 Thess 2:4), cognate or synonymous terms (Rom 1:28; 3:8; 1 Cor 15:49), temporal adverbs (Phil 2:12), or comparative adverbs (1 Thess 4:1). Three are uncertain. Καθώς in Phil 1:7 may be in an incomplete sentence, but probably looks back to the prayer in 1:3-4. Καθὼς οἴδατε (‘just as you know’) in 1 Thess 1:5 is also likely anaphoric, looking back to εἰδότες (‘knowing’) in 1:4. The inferential particle ἄρα (‘so then’) in Gal 3:7 might theoretically correlate with καθώς in 3:6, but such a combination, introducing correlated clauses, is found nowhere else in biblical Greek, nor in a search of the TLG database up through the fourth century.

πίστις in the whole of 3:1-9 should be translated as ‘faith’, not ‘faithfulness’.²³ Most modern English translations see it that way.²⁴ Then the mentions of πίστις in 3:10-14 and 3:22 are also likely to refer to faith, especially as Paul would hardly say (3:12) that the law had nothing to do with faithfulness. The same applies to the participle πιστεύουσιν (‘believers’) used in 3:22 alongside πίστις. This means that when Paul uses πίστις in 3:23-25, the consistent use of the word leading up to the passage has been to refer to faith, not faithfulness, and that should influence our reading. Reading faithfulness for the noun and faith for the verb minimises faith just when Paul is emphasising it.

2.3 Πίστις as human faith and Christ’s faithfulness

Some take πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 as both human faith in Christ and Christ’s faithfulness,²⁵ part of a growing tendency to read πίστις with a double meaning in Paul.²⁶ Hays denies a clear distinction between these two senses of πίστις in Hellenistic Greek.²⁷ Martyn sees the passage as describing ‘the coming of both Christ’s faith and the faith that is kindled by Christ’s faith’.²⁸

Some who take this approach emphasise faith as participation. For von Dobbeler, faith is participation in God and in the community of the church,²⁹ and though Galatians 3:22 speaks of human faith towards God, πίστις in 3:23-25 comes from God to humanity, providing access to God’s presence for all.³⁰ For

23. Πιστός in 3:9 also likely describes Abraham as a believer, rather than as faithful. Πιστός is used with the sense of ‘faithful’ in the Pauline corpus ten times when describing people (1 Cor 4:2; 4:17; 7:25; Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7,9; 1 Tim 1:12; 3:11; 2 Tim 2:2). In eight verses (if we include this one) it refers to believing (2 Cor 6:15; Gal 3:9; 1 Tim 4:3; 4:10,12; 5:16; 6:2 (twice); Titus 1:6). A couple of references are uncertain (Eph 1:1; Col 1:2). Outside of Paul, the adjective is used in the New Testament for ‘believing’ in John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1; and 1 Pet 1:21, showing its availability for this sense across several strands of New Testament writing.

24. E.g. CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NRSV.

25. See, for example, Susan Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul’s Letter to the Galatians in its Anatolian Cultic Context*, JSNTSup 248 (T&T Clark, 2003), 352.

26. See F. Gerald Downing, ‘Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith’, *NTS* 56 (2010): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688509990221>, and Morna D. Hooker, ‘Another Look at πίστις Χριστοῦ’, *SJT* 69 (2016): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930615000770>.

27. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 295. See also Ernst Lohmeyer, *Grundlagen paulinischer Theologie*, BHT 1 (Mohr Siebeck, 1929), 121; D. W. B. Robinson, “‘Faith of Jesus Christ’ – a New Testament Debate”, *RTR* 29 (1970): 76.

28. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (Doubleday, 1997), 362, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261691>.

29. Von Dobbeler, *Glaube als Teilhabe*, 45, 277.

30. Axel von Dobbeler, ‘Metaphernkonflikt und Missionsstrategie: Beobachtungen zur personifizierenden Rede vom Glauben in Gal 3:23-25’, *TZ* 54 (1998): 24, 34.

Hay, faith is ‘the mode by which Christians participate in Christ, a mode with both individual and corporate dimensions, and one that combines elements of cognitive assertion, trust, and faithfulness’.³¹ Πίστις in 3:22 could be either objective or subjective, and in 3:23-25 means the appearance of Jesus as the ground for faith.³² Hagen Pifer takes an objective genitive reading in Galatians 3:22 and sees πίστις in 3:22-26 as mainly human faith in Christ, albeit with other concepts added.³³

Some emphasise the relationality of faith. For Morgan, πίστις describes relationships ‘between God, Christ, and humanity, but also between Paul and his community’. She says that ‘*Pistis*, in linguistic terms, is an action nominal, encompassing both active and passive meanings of its cognate verb’ so ‘it is surprising that *pistis Christou* has not been understood more often as simultaneously Christ’s faithfulness to God and human faith in Christ.’³⁴ But even if a noun is an ‘action nominal’, signalling a verbal idea, that does not make it more likely than any other noun to be multivalent.³⁵ Oakes, drawing on Morgan’s work, argues that πίστις is ‘a relational way of life: a way of trust, loyalty and/or reliability’.³⁶ He sees πίστις in 3:22 as going from people to

31. David M. Hay, ‘Paul’s Understanding of Faith as Participation’, in *Paul and His Theology*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Brill, 2006), 46. Hay’s earlier interpretation combined evidence and faith, two possible senses of πίστις, to produce ‘ground for faith’, a move hard to justify linguistically (David M. Hay, ‘*Pistis* as “Ground for Faith” in Hellenized Judaism and Paul’, *JBL* 108 (1989), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267114>).

32. Hay, ‘Faith as Participation’, 74.

33. Πίστις is also ‘who Christ is for us’ and ‘a shorthand reference to the gospel’. The coming of faith is ‘the coming of the people of faith’, and of ‘the era in which Christians are characterized by their faith in Christ’ (Jeanette Hagen Pifer, *Faith as Participation: An Exegetical Study of Some Key Pauline Texts*, WUNT 2/486 (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 200–203, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-156477-2>).

34. Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 273–277, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198724148.001.0001>; Sang Mok Lee, ‘Christ’s Πίστις vs. Caesar’s Fides: Πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians and the Roman Imperial Cult’, *ExpTim* 130 (2019): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524618813282>, makes the same point (though without discussing Galatians 2:16, 2:20 or 3:22, where the expression is used).

35. Porter and Pitts, wanting to hold form and function together, resist seeing verbal ideas too easily in nouns, including πίστις (Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, ‘Πίστις with a Preposition and Genitive Modifier: Lexical, Semantic, and Syntactic Considerations in the Πίστις Χριστοῦ Discussion’, in Bird and Sprinkle, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 47).

36. Peter Oakes, ‘*Pistis* as Relational Way of Life in Galatians’, *JSNT* 40 (2018): 265, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X18755933>.

Christ, or to God, while in 3:23-26 it could go either way.³⁷ While understanding faith as a relational concept has merit, it does not necessarily imply deliberate ambiguity.

Downing has posited deliberate ambiguity in Paul's πίστις Χριστοῦ construction, because he finds little concern among Greek philosophers for defining words narrowly, nor for avoiding ambiguity.³⁸ Words were believed to name or evoke semantically rich concepts. But Downing argues mainly from the silence of ancient authors on potential ambiguities. The evidence he adduces suggests rather the confidence which philosophers had in language to communicate successfully and shows their awareness of the need to communicate clearly, distinguishing shades of meaning.³⁹

Drawing on Downing, and on the work of Charles Ruhl on monosemic bias, Downs and Lappenga argue for a both/and solution, suggesting that the various, related senses of a word are not to be distinguished as in traditional polysemy, but that the use of a word brings all the various nuances and implications into play: 'Paul assumes the story of the faithfulness of the risen Christ, who incorporates believers 'in Christ Jesus ... through πίστις.'⁴⁰ However, nothing in the theory of monosemy necessitates reading multiple interpretive senses in any particular instance of a word. A monosemic approach looks 'for a single general meaning underlying all the variants', while modulations are ascribed 'to local contextual effects'.⁴¹ That single meaning is 'often highly abstract and remote from practical usefulness'.⁴² Ruhl rejects overloading word meaning and resists the assumption of inherent ambiguity in words. Ambiguity comes from pragmatic factors.⁴³

37. Oakes, 'Pistis as Relational', 271-272.

38. Downing, 'Ambiguity', 155.

39. Philo discusses the phenomenon of homonyms and synonyms in *Plant.* 1.150-153, *Gig.* 1.56, and *Her.* 1.22.

40. Downs and Lappenga, *Faithfulness*, 29-30, 101-102.

41. D. A. Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*, 3rd ed., Oxford Textbooks in Linguistics (Oxford University Press, 2011), 322.

42. Charles Ruhl, *On Monosemy: A Study in Linguistic Semantics*, SUNY Series in Linguistics (State University of New York, 1989), 7.

43. Ruhl, *On Monosemy*, vii-viii, 39. Porter, an advocate of monosemy, distinguishes various possible senses of πίστις (Stanley E. Porter, 'Greek Linguistics and Lexicography', in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Crossway, 2011), 27-37); Porter, *Linguistic Analysis*, 51-59. Porter and Pitts differentiate the abstract meaning ('faith'), the ethical meaning ('faithfulness') and the doctrinal meaning ('the faith') of πίστις (Porter and Pitts, 'Πίστις with a Preposition and

For most linguists, however, the majority of words are polysemous, and readers must and do disambiguate an author's intended sense from among various possibilities,⁴⁴ whether those senses are discrete⁴⁵ or clusters on a continuum.⁴⁶ Distinguishing the senses of a word is easier the further apart in meaning those senses are. First-century use of πίστις shows a range of senses including guarantee, proof, evidence, pledge, faithfulness, and faith or belief.⁴⁷ All these express something that can be relied upon – a pledge, a rhetorical proof, a person's faithfulness – except faith, which expresses reliance. Faith is therefore conceptually distinct among all these senses, and less likely to be combined ambiguously with others. Faith was not the most common sense for πίστις, but it became the most marked sense in the social dialect of the early church.

Deliberate ambiguity is rare and normally signalled by the author through contextual indicators.⁴⁸ Barr warned in 1961 of the danger of illegitimate totality transfer, when various possible senses of a term are read into a single instance.⁴⁹ He critiqued Torrance's notion that Paul uses πίστις Χριστοῦ as a “polarized expression” involving the faithfulness of Christ but also the answering faithfulness or faith of man.⁵⁰ Silva comments: ‘We should assume one meaning unless there are strong exegetical (literary, contextual) grounds to the contrary.’⁵¹ Cruse says that contexts act ‘in such a way as to cause a single sense, from among those associated with any ambiguous word form, to become operative’ and ‘It is rarely the utterer's intention that it should be interpreted

Genitive Modifier’, 36–38, 49–50). Ruhl's work on monosemy seems to have had more influence on biblical studies than other disciplines.

44. Jiangtian Li and Blair C. Armstrong, ‘Probing the Representational Structure of Regular Polysemy via Sense Analogy Questions: Insights from Contextual Word Vectors’, *Cognitive Science* 48 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.13416>; Michelle Liu, ‘Polysemy and Philosophy’, *Philosophy Compass* 20 (2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.70040>.

45. See Michael Devitt, ‘Semantic Polysemy and Psycholinguistics’, *Mind & Language* 36 (2021): 134–157, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12327>.

46. D. A. Cruse, *Lexical Semantics* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 71; Cruse, *Meaning in Language*, 323; Jiangtian Li, ‘Semantic Minimalism and the Continuous Nature of Polysemy’, *Mind & Language* 39 (2024): 680–705, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12509>.

47. John W. Taylor, ‘Paul's Understanding of Faith’ (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2004), 11.

48. Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (SPCK, 1989), 175.

49. Barr, *Semantics*, 218. See also Kevin W. McFadden, ‘Does ΠΙΣΤΙΣ Mean “Faith(fulness)” in Paul?’, *TynBul* 66 (2015): 252–257, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29400>.

50. Barr, *Semantics*, 165 n.161.

51. Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Zondervan, 1983), 151.

in two (or more) different ways simultaneously.’⁵² Matlock, following Cruse, has shown that πίστις in Paul is a polysemous word, if we accept the criteria that separate senses of the term are ‘independently maximisable’, when one sense could be held to be true while another may not.⁵³

Taking πίστις as both human faith in Christ and the faithfulness of Christ shares the weaknesses of the ‘faithfulness of Christ’ position in terms of contextual fit and complexity. It adds the inherent unlikelihood of deliberate ambiguity, and the danger of illegitimate totality transfer. Making deliberate ambiguity even less likely, at least in the phrase ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in 3:22, which likely governs the meaning of πίστις in 3:23-25, is that readers would be expected to recognise two simultaneous ambiguities – in the sense of πίστις (faith and faithfulness), and in the syntax of the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (in and of Jesus Christ).⁵⁴

2.4 Πίστις objectified

A number of scholars, rather than seeing faith as a subjective human response or experience, read the article before πίστις in 3:23 as objectifying the noun. Some translate it as ‘the faith’, meaning the content of the apostolic preaching, the gospel, or Christianity,⁵⁵ seeing the same sense in Galatians 1:23⁵⁶ (though Morgan insists that relational faith is in view at 1:23).⁵⁷ Certainly Paul’s understanding of faith is closely related to the content of gospel proclamation. But that relationship is one of trust or belief in that proclamation, as is clear in 3:1-5, where listening with faith – or the message of faith – leads to the

52. Cruse, *Lexical Semantics*, 53.

53. Matlock, ‘Detheologizing’, 4–5, and see Cruse, *Lexical Semantics*, 60–61. For example, τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ in Rom 3:3 refers to the faithfulness of God, but not also to God’s faith.

54. As Hooker, ‘Another Look’, 53–54, recognises, but accepts. McFadden points out that it is consistently Pauline to use the phrase ‘by faith’ without ambiguity (Kevin W. McFadden, *Faith in the Son of God: The Place of Christ-Oriented Faith within Pauline Theology* (Crossway, 2021), 224–229).

55. BDAG, s.v. Πίστις, 726–728; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 1982), 181; R. Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Eerdmans, 1965), 107; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Word, 1990), 145; Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 144. Mundle equates faith with Christianity in much of Paul’s writings (Wilhelm Mundle, *Der Glaubensbegriff des Paulus: Eine Untersuchung zur Dogmengeschichte des ältesten Christentums* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 92–93).

56. See Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief: Auslegung*, HThKNT (Herder, 1988), 207; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 145; Sprinkle, ‘Eschatological Event’, 177.

57. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 266.

reception of the Spirit. In 3:6-9, Abraham's faith – his believing God and the gospel announced in advance by scripture – and Gentiles' justifying faith are equated. Even if the historical dimension is in view in 3:23-25 (and perhaps 1:23), and 'the faith' is starting to be used in an objectified sense to refer to the message which was proclaimed (cf. Acts 13:8, 2 Cor 13:5, 1 Tim 4:1-10, Jude 3), it still indicates how central faith was to that message, and to the early church, a key aspect of its self-definition. If πίστις refers to the message here, it is the message viewed through the lens of the response of faith. Such a use could only develop where *faith* in Christ fundamentally identified the church, similar to naming members of the churches as believers.⁵⁸ In any case, a reader of Galatians has encountered twelve mentions of faith (πίστις) between 1:23 and 3:23, none of which clearly mean the message of the gospel. Context does not favour this proposal.

A related stance, sometimes called the 'third view', is to objectify and broaden πίστις as a reference to the entire apocalyptic event of the coming of Christ.⁵⁹ In this approach, πίστις stands for 'the event of the gospel itself' which is 'an objective event – God's saving act in Christ'.⁶⁰ It is 'God's act in Christ seen as a whole',⁶¹ or 'the event which comes from God in the new covenant'.⁶² For Hermann Binder, faith is a divine rather than human function: 'The human is in the *pistis* and not the *pistis* in the human.'⁶³ He sees faith in Galatians 3:23-25 as 'a divine reality, a trans-subjective entity' which exists prior to and independent of its realisation in humans.⁶⁴ Sprinkle objects to the objective genitive view of Galatians 3:22, and its application to 3:23-26, precisely because he sees it as requiring *too much* interpretation. For him, the third view is preferable because it reads πίστις Χριστοῦ as 'a single entity'. But there are two words in the phrase, and the double-barrelled gloss Sprinkle uses, 'Christ-faith', illustrates this.⁶⁵ Schliesser sees πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 as 'an eschatological event of

58. See Paul R. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 73–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139003438>.

59. Schliesser, 'Faith in Early Christianity: An Encyclopedic and Bibliographical Outline', in Frey, Schliesser, and Ueberschaer, *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens*, 20.

60. Sprinkle, 'Eschatological Event', 180.

61. Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (Peeters, 1988), 55–57.

62. Hermann Binder, *Der Glaube bei Paulus* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 163.

63. 'Der Mensch ist in der *pistis* und nicht der *pistis* im Menschen' (Binder, *Glaube*, 12).

64. 'Eine göttliche Geschehenswirklichkeit, eine transsubjektive Größe' (Binder, *Glaube*, 53).

65. Sprinkle, 'Eschatological Event', 180–181.

salvation that marks a turn of the times and opens up the salvation-historical possibility of faith',⁶⁶ an apocalyptic-eschatological, 'trans-subjective' event.⁶⁷

Some adherents of this view also favour double meanings. Thus, for Schliesser, πίστις in this passage is both a divine event which 'fundamentally transforms reality', and at the same time the appropriate human response of faith.⁶⁸ For Cosgrove, it is metonymy for the gospel, for 'God's act in Jesus Christ seen as a whole and embracing both the opening up of an eschatological reality from the divine side ... and the grasping of eschatological life in faith by believers', and refers 'to the whole of the eschatological reality of salvation inaugurated by God in Jesus Christ'.⁶⁹ For Hafemann, πίστις, which he renders as 'faith(fulness)', is 'a metonymy for the new age of the new creation', which is the new covenant age 'because it characterizes both the Messiah who has brought it about and the life of those who belong to him'.⁷⁰ Wright sees πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 both as faithfulness, and as hypostasis for 'the messianic moment'.⁷¹ Sprinkle, at least, holds consistently to a 'third view' reading of πίστις in this passage, but objects to the traditional view because he finds it 'difficult to understand' how faith, viewed as 'religious disposition', could be seen to 'come' and be 'apocalyptically revealed'.⁷² This will be addressed below.

The third view as an exegetical solution tends towards semantic overloading, when ideas inferred from the context and discourse are attributed to a single word, making it do too much work.⁷³ Schliesser sees πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 as 'an eschatological divine act' which in turn engenders 'existence in the

66. Schliesser, 'Faith in Early Christianity', 20. Schliesser also makes the title 'Christ' in Gal 3:24 complex: it means 'the event of salvation, God's redemptive eschatological act', and 'denotes all that God has done in Christ' (Benjamin Schliesser, "'Christ-Faith" as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23-26): A Third View on Πίστις Χριστοῦ', *JSNT* 38 (2016): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X15621654>).

67. See Schliesser, 'Christ-Faith', 278-283.

68. Benjamin Schliesser, 'Glaube als Ereignis: Zu einer vernachlässigten Dimension des paulinischen Glaubensverständnisses', *ZTK* 117 (2020): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1628/zthk-2020-0003>.

69. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, 57, italics mine.

70. Scott J. Hafemann, 'Yaein: Yes and No to Luther's Reading of Galatians 3:6-14', in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter*, ed. Mark W. Elliott et al. (Baker Academic, 2014), 122; Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Servant of the New Covenant: Pauline Polarities in Eschatological Perspective*, WUNT 435 (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 198-199.

71. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Fortress, 2013), 873-874.

72. Sprinkle, 'Eschatological Event', 178-179.

73. See Dwight Bolinger, 'Semantic Overloading: A Restudy of the Verb Remind', *Language* 47 (1971): 522-547, <https://doi.org/10.2307/412376>.

time and space of eschatological Christ-faith'.⁷⁴ We can infer such an event from the letter, without making one word, πίστις, communicate all that. Louw writes of the difference between the meaning of a word and its implication. A word can have a few meanings, but be used with many implications, indicated contextually: 'The meaning for which a word serves is only that which the word itself, on its own, contributes to the context.'⁷⁵ Grice says, 'Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.'⁷⁶ Only the minimal meaning necessary should be attributed to a word itself, sufficient to satisfactorily explain the text in context.⁷⁷

Kevin Grasso argues that πίστις plus an objective genitive modifier, as is found in Galatians 3:22, can only mean believing something to be true, rather than trusting or believing in someone. This is because a noun carrying a verbal idea plus an objective genitive should encode the simple construction of the equivalent verb plus an object. He insists that πιστεύω followed by a nominal object means believing something (to be true), whether that object is accusative or dative, though sometimes with a dative object the structure would be verb+dative+accusative: believe someone *that* x is true. When Greek authors wanted to indicate faith or trust in someone, with verbs or nouns from the πιστ- root, they added a prepositional phrase.⁷⁸ Therefore, he argues, the use of πίστις plus a genitive in the construction πίστις Χριστοῦ indicates not an objective (or subjective) idea, but a genitive of content, or quality, describing the nature of the faith.

However, as noted above, Paul frequently uses combinations of verbal, nominal, and sometimes adjectival forms from the same root, with no evidence of distinction in meaning. While πίστις plus an objective genitive in Greek frequently indicates belief that something is true, this is not always the case. Grasso dismisses ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ ('Have faith in God') in Mark 11:22 as meaning that the disciples should 'believe the truth ... of God's ability to answer'.⁷⁹ The mistake, I think, is to assume that for πίστις to mean 'trust in' rather than 'belief that' necessitates a more complex argument structure than

74. Schliesser, "Christ-Faith", 286–287.

75. J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Scholars Press, 1982), 51. Louw does not mean, of course, that a word can have significance *without* context.

76. H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 279.

77. Grice calls this a 'Modified Occam's Razor' (*Way of Words*, 279).

78. Kevin Grasso, 'A Linguistic Analysis of πίστις χριστοῦ: The Case for the Third View', *JSNT* 43 (2020): 116–124, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064x20949385>.

79. Grasso, 'Linguistic Analysis', 130. This has been pointed out previously (Kevin W. McFadden, 'The Πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate and its Recent Developments', *RTR* 82 (2023): 257, <https://doi.org/10.53521/a373>); and see the extensive critique by Aaron Michael

a simple verb-object sequence, needing a prepositional phrase to select the sense ‘trust’ for πίστις – that trusting, or trusting in, was a more complex idea than what Grasso calls ‘a simple conviction that something is true’.⁸⁰

But there are numerous examples in ancient Greek literature where πίστις with a genitive object means trust, or confidence, without the addition of a preposition.⁸¹ As to the object of trust, this could be impersonal, abstract, or personal. Plutarch writes of Galba, whose age added confidence in his caution (προσετίθει πίστιν εὐλαβείας τὸ γῆρας, *Galb.* 3.3); of Pelopidas, whose statesmanship showed the Greeks that they could place trust in the justice of Thebes (τῇ πίστει τῆς δικαιοσύνης, *Pel.* 26.4); of Pompey, who appointed Cato the Younger to high position because of both his fear and trust in the man (διὰ πίστιν ἅμα καὶ φόβον τοῦ ἀνδρός, *Cat. Min.* 55.1); of Cicero, who had not yet given up his trust in Caesar (τὴν Καίσαρος ... πίστιν, *Cic.* 47.3); and of Porsena, who was persuaded to make peace with Rome, because of trust in the Romans’ virtue and nobility (διὰ πίστιν ἀρετῆς καὶ καλοκαγαθίας, *Comp. Sol. Publ.* 4.4). Appian writes of Scipio, who, encouraging his troops in the midst of a difficult war, inspired his soldiers to trust in the things he was saying (ἔς τε πίστιν τῶν λεγομένων – *Hist. Rom.* 6.26). Demosthenes (*Cor.* 18.215) has σωφροσύνης πίστιν περὶ ὕμῶν ἔχοντες ἔδειξαν (‘they showed confidence in your sobriety’). Aeschines (*Ctes.* 3.208) writes of the inveterate perjurer who depends on ‘trust in oaths’ (τὴν τῶν ὀρκῶν πίστιν), and ‘continually insists on being believed because of his oaths’ (ἀεὶ δὲ μεθ’ ὀρκῶν ἀξιοῦντι πιστεῦεσθαι). Here, as in Paul, the parallel with the verbal cognate strengthens the case for trust as the intended sense. Similar examples are found in the Apostolic Fathers: τῇ πίστει τῆς ἐπαγγελίας καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ζωοποιούμενοι (‘made alive by faith in the promise, and by the word’, *Barn.* 6.17), and πίστιν θεοῦ ἐν κακῇ διδασκαλίᾳ φθείρη (‘corrupts faith in God by evil teaching’, *Ign. Eph.* 16:2). An objective genitive modifying πίστις, as in Galatians 3:22, could indeed signify trust, whether in a person, or a person’s words.

The various alternatives to the traditional view address the difficulties of the passage, especially the notions of the coming and revealing of faith, by

Jensen, ‘Examining the ‘Third View’ of Πίστις Χριστοῦ’, *JSNT* 48 (2025): 249–252, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064x251314374>.

80. Grasso, ‘Linguistic Analysis’, 122. The word πίστις can indicate trust or faith in someone, without the addition of a prepositional phrase, e.g. Demosthenes, *Cor.* 18.41–42, Aeschines, *Ctes.* 2.23: ἡμεν ἄξιοι τῆς ὑμετέρας πίστεως (‘We were worthy of your trust’). Sometimes the object of faith is in the dative case (Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 1445).

81. Some of the following, plus many other examples, are pointed out by R. Barry Matlock, “‘Even the Demons Believe’: Paul and Πίστις Χριστοῦ”, *CBQ* 64 (2002): 304 n.24; and Jensen, ‘Third View’, 252–257.

defining the term πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 to mean something other than faith or trust. Each has a certain theological appeal, tending to reduce the role of human faith and focus on Christ, or his faithfulness, or the event of his coming, or the gospel. Nevertheless, each of the alternatives has weaknesses, in terms of context, semantic overloading, and other linguistic or grammatical difficulties. How then can we understand what Paul is saying?

3. The coming of faith personified

The argument here will have two main elements. One is that the perceived difficulties in Galatians 3:23-25 can be resolved if we understand that Paul is employing the rhetorical device of personification. The other is that taking πίστις to mean faith, rather than faithfulness, or another construct, suits both the details of the passage in its context and the overall argument of Galatians (and theologically is no less Christocentric).

3.1 Personification

Paul employs the rhetorical device of personification, describing an eschatological drama, in which sin (ἁμαρτία, Gal 3:22), scripture (γραφή, Gal 3:8,22), law (νόμος, Gal 3:23-25), and faith (πίστις, Gal 3:22-26) are all personified and given cosmic importance. This concentration of personification shows its key role in the passage. Personification dramatises, but does not change, the fundamental meaning of the terms used. In this drama, just as the law of Moses, personified as custodian of Israel (3:24), is still the law, and scripture, personified as a guard (3:22), is still scripture, faith personified is still faith.

Personification, a species of metaphor, speaks of a non-personal, abstract or inanimate entity as if it were personal. It is 'the product of a process of metamorphosis, the changing of a linguistic abstraction into a concrete person'.⁸² The personification of abstract entities was common in the ancient world.⁸³ The Greeks and Romans, as far back as Homer and Hesiod, personified abstract qualities, often representing them as gods and goddesses.⁸⁴ Hesiod

82. Philip Hardie, 'Metamorphosis, Metaphor, and Allegory in Latin Epic', in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*, ed. Margaret H. Beissinger, Jane Tylus, and Susanne L. Wofford (University of California Press, 1999), 96, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520919730-007>.

83. See Joseph R. Dodson, *The 'Powers' of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans* (de Gruyter, 2008), 29–40, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110209778>.

84. This topic is well covered by Emma Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues: Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece* (Duckworth, 2000).

(c. 700 BC) writes of night giving birth to children: 'And Night bare hateful Doom and black Fate and Death, and she bare Sleep and the tribe of Dreams' (*Theog.* 2.173-174 (Powell)).⁸⁵ Antiphon describes a prosecutor personifying suspicion: 'The tracks of suspicion obviously lead to this man' (φανερῶς δὲ τὰ ἔχνη τῆς ὑποψίας εἰς τοῦτον φέροντα (*First Tetralogy* 3.10)). Socrates personified pleasure as a goddess (Plato, *Phileb.* 12c). Plato personified justice (δίκη, *Leg.* 715c). Quintilian, writing on rhetoric, says,

We also often invent Personifications, as Vergil invented Rumour, Prodicus (according to Xenophon's report) Pleasure and Virtue, and Ennius Death and Life, whom he represents in a Satire as debating with each other. (*Inst.* Or. 9.2.36, (Russell, LCL))⁸⁶

The Augustan poets Virgil and Ovid use personification extensively.⁸⁷ Rumour flies through the cities of Libya, a monstrous, malignant bird (Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.173-206).⁸⁸ Ovid personifies justice, fear, hunger amid many others (*Metam.* 1.95-97, 114-115; 8.777-842).⁸⁹ There were altars in Rome to hope, liberty, virtue, and shame.⁹⁰ Even democracy was the subject of personification and sacrifice.⁹¹

Faith was personified and worshipped at times.⁹² The poet Theognis laments, 'Hope is the only good god still left among humankind; the others have forsaken us and gone to Olympus. Trust [πίστις], the great god, has departed' (*Elegies* 1135-7 (Gerber, LCL)). A temple of Πίστις was built in Athens,⁹³ and Plutarch

85. Barry B. Powell, ed., *The Poems of Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, and the Shield of Herakles* (University of California Press, 2017), 42.

86. He is talking about *prosopopoeia*, a form of personification when speech is attributed to an abstract or impersonal entity. *Prosopopoeia* can also refer to the hypothetical attribution of speech to a person.

87. See Dunstan M. Lowe, 'Personification Allegory in the *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Mnemosyne* 61 (2008): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852507X235209>.

88. See Hardie, 'Metamorphosis', 97-98.

89. C. S. Lewis distinguished allegory or personification, which were common in the Roman poets, from symbolism or sacramentalism, associated with Platonism. Personification starts with the immaterial, such as love, and invents a persona for it, while symbolism starts with a universal 'love', which a person may express (C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, (Oxford University Press, 1958), 45).

90. Thomas Keightley, *The Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy*, 4th ed. (London, 1877), 487.

91. Emma Stafford, 'Personification in Greek Religious Thought and Practice', in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, ed. D. Ogden (Blackwell, 2007), 82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1n357gw>.

92. See Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 45.

93. O. Höfer, 'Pistis', in *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher (Teubner, 1909), 2513.

mentions worship of the Roman Πίστις in Chalcis, alongside the worship of Zeus, Rome, Apollo, and the Emperor Titus (*Flam.* 378).⁹⁴ Images of Πίστις and its Latin equivalent *Fides* appear on coins; the same image used for Πίστις on Greek inscriptions and coins is found in Rome for *Fides*.⁹⁵ According to Roman lore, Numa, the city's second king, established a tradition which resulted in the construction of a temple to *Fides*, to encourage good faith between the state and its citizens.⁹⁶ Here the Senate would gather during crises (Appian, *Bell. civ.* 1.2.16), to make vows (Plutarch, *Num.* 16.1), and even to enact treaties between Rome and its subjects. An inscription from an association of merchants on Delos (97/98 BC) dedicates a statue of Πίστις (PHI 64201 = AGRW 7730).⁹⁷

Not everyone was convinced that abstract personifications should be worshipped. Cicero's interlocutor Cotta sceptically explains the civic process of divinisation, when 'some exceptionally potent force is itself designated by a title of divinity, for example Faith and Mind; we see the shrines on Capitol Hill dedicated to them both' (*Nat. d.* 2.61 (Rackham, LCL)).⁹⁸ However, Cicero does not count these as gods: 'Intelligence, faith, hope, virtue, honor, victory, safety, concord and the other things of this nature are obviously abstractions, not personal deities' (*Nat. d.* 3.24.61 (Rackham, LCL)).

Personification occurs frequently in the Old Testament and early Jewish literature. Sin crouches at the door (Gen 4:7). Mountains sing and clap their hands (Isa 55:12). The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). Righteousness looks down from the heavens, kisses peace (Ps 85:9-10), and rejoices (1QM 17.6-8). The earth sees (Ps 97:4). Cities are rebellious (Ezra 4:12), and Jerusalem puts on clothes (Isa 52:1).⁹⁹ Wine is a betrayer, and Sheol has an appetite (Hab 2:5; Isa

94. See also von Dobbeler, *Glaube als Teilhabe*, 291.

95. Maria Caccamo Caltabiano, 'Pistis', in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ed. Hans-Christoph Ackerman and Jean-Robert Gisler (Artemis Verlag, 1994), 412-413; Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 128-132.

96. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 2.75.3; Cicero, *Off.* 3.29.104.

97. Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Baylor University Press; de Gruyter, 2012).

98. 'Faith and Mind' here translates *Fides et Mens*.

99. These are also instances of metonymy; the city stands for the people it contains. Jews and Greeks personified their cities at times; see Annemarieke van der Woude, 'The Comfort of Zion: Personification in Isaiah 40-66', in 'Enlarge the Site of Your Tent': *The City as Unifying Theme in Isaiah*, ed. Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen and Annemarieke van der Woude (Brill, 2011), 159-167, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004194243_010; Yorgis Yatromanolakis, 'Poleos erastes: The Greek City as the Beloved', in *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin, *The Centre for Hellenic Studies* (Ashgate, 2005), 267-284, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315247014-18>.

5:14) and lies naked before God (Job 26:6). Wisdom is personified frequently in Proverbs and other Jewish literature.¹⁰⁰

Paul personifies abstractions on several occasions, most famously in his invocation of love (1 Cor 13:5-7).¹⁰¹ In Romans 8:19-22 he personifies creation, groaning in its bondage to corruption, waiting for 'the glorious freedom of the children of God'. In 1 Corinthians 15:55 he combines personification with apostrophe, a rhetorical device that uses a sudden change of addressee, 'O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?' In Galatians, aside from our passage, Paul personifies the old and new covenants as two women, one a slave and one free (4:21-31). Galatians 5:4 could be another example of the personification of πίστις: 'faith, working through love', using the same verb ἐνεργέω used by Paul to personify sinful passions (Rom 7:8), death (2 Cor 4:12), and God's power (Col 1:29).

In Romans 5:12-21, a passage very relevant to the one we are examining, sin, death, law, and grace occupy a dramatic narrative going back to Adam, culminating in the coming of Christ. Paul uses personification to depict a vast cosmic drama of redemption. He views history 'as a stage on which certain figures perform as actors', including sin, death, law, and grace.¹⁰² 'Sin entered the world' through Adam (5:12), so 'Death reigned from Adam to Moses' (5:14), and 'Sin reigned in death' (5:21). Then 'the law entered, so transgression increased', but 'grace abounded all the more' (5:20), 'so that grace would reign through Jesus Christ our Lord' (5:21). Personification continues in chapter six, with personal attributes assigned to sin, law, grace, obedience, and righteousness. Sin must not reign (6:12), and 'will not have dominion over you, because you are not under law, but under grace' (6:14).¹⁰³ Believers are no longer under the reign of sin, but instead serve obedience and righteousness (6:16-18).

Some commentators see sin and death in these passages as powers that oppress humanity.¹⁰⁴ According to Käsemann, 'Paul's language about sin and

100. Prov 1:20-33; 7:4-5; 8:1-9:6; c.f. also Wis 6:12-23; Sir 24; Luke 7:35.

101. Love is also personified in the Mishnah: 'Love, inspired by ulterior motives, dies out when those motives disappear; but love without such motives never fades' (m. Avot 5:21).

102. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology: A Brief Sketch*, 2nd ed. (Prentice Hall, 1989), 76.

103. The law is also personified in Rom 7:7. See Joseph R. Dodson, 'The Voices of Scripture: Citations and Personifications in Paul', *BBR* 20 (2010): 423, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26424453>.

104. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition', *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 237, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430405800302>; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia

death in Romans 5–8 conveys a worldview where anthropomorphic beings and cosmic powers attack and invade the person from all sides.¹⁰⁵ Jewett says that ‘the language of personification does not do justice to the apocalyptic worldview within which Paul is operating’.¹⁰⁶ Gaventa insists that dismissing these depictions as ‘only literary device[s] runs the risk of trivializing’. She is, however, still hesitant to claim that there is a ‘literal character by the name of sin’.¹⁰⁷ Certainly Paul portrays sin as a power, and this may be an example of when personification becomes hypostasis, where a personified entity is depicted as a distinct power. However, it is unlikely that Paul thought of sin as a power having an independent, hypostatic existence. He moves rather freely between depictions of sin as personified power, to sin as an action, and sin as something which can be reckoned or charged (Romans 5:12–14). And if sin and death are hypostatic cosmic powers, then law, grace, righteousness, and obedience must also be such powers, given that Paul personifies them in the same passages. This seems highly unlikely. We may leave further discussion, at this point, to the realists and nominalists, but in any event the personification depicts sin functioning as a ruling power.

When Paul depicts sin personified, he uses the singular ἁμαρτία. Similar formulations, as Dunn points out,¹⁰⁸ are found in 1 Corinthians 15:56, ‘The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law’, and, importantly for our purposes, in Galatians 3:22: ‘But the scripture confined all things under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to believers.’¹⁰⁹ In this text both sin and scripture are personified, such that sin is a power temporarily made to serve the purposes of scripture. The use of the singular γραφή (scripture) here is probably in subtle distinction to νόμος (law), which is mainly used in Galatians for the Sinai covenant with its obligations.¹¹⁰ Paul often uses γραφή

(Fortress Press, 2007), 374. According to Timo Laato, ‘Sin appears as a demonic person and exercises a rule of terror over humanity’ (Timo Laato, ‘Paul’s Anthropological Considerations’, in Carson, O’Brien, and Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism II*, 359).

105. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Eerdmans, 1980), 150, though, as Wasserman says, they are ‘of a largely unspecified type’ (Emma Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War: Divine Politics and Polemics in the Letters of Paul*, AYBRL (Yale University Press, 2018), 7, <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300235630>).

106. Jewett, *Romans*, 374.

107. Gaventa, ‘Cosmic Power’, 238.

108. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Eerdmans, 1998), 111.

109. See Günter Röhser, *Metaphorik und Personifikation der Sünde: Antike Sündenvorstellungen und paulinische Hamartia*, WUNT 2/25 (Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 168.

110. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1988), 167; G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians* (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 106; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 145.

to introduce a biblical statement¹¹¹ and some scholars, taking the article before γραφή as anaphoric, have searched back through Galatians to find a scripture quote or allusion which fits. The favourite is Deuteronomy 27:26, quoted in Galatians 3:10.¹¹² But the singular 'scripture' in other instances precedes a quoted text, and there is always a verb of speaking, as in 'The scripture says'. Neither of these features are found in Galatians 3:22. In addition, there are four other scriptures quoted or alluded to in Galatians after 3:10 and before 3:22.¹¹³ It is asking a lot of readers to go back to 3:10 to make the connection. Some consider that Paul is referring to the scriptures in general,¹¹⁴ or that γραφή here denotes unspecified statements of scripture which condemn sin.¹¹⁵ But in the Pauline literature, usually the plural γραφαί is used to introduce the overall teaching of the scriptures (Rom 1:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3-4).¹¹⁶

The most likely reason for the singular γραφή instead of the plural in Galatians 3:22 is that here it is personified, as in 3:8, where foreknowledge and the voice of a herald or prophet are attributed to scripture, as it proclaims the gospel in advance to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:3).¹¹⁷ This prepares the reader for the next mention of same word, in Galatians 3:22. Scripture – this time the whole of scripture – has confined all things under sin.¹¹⁸ The drama is played out also with ἁμαρτία (sin), and νόμος (law), in a manner very similar to the multiple personifications in Romans 5 and 6. In this context, it is likely that πίστις too is personified in 3:22, as the agent of the promised divine gift: 'that the promise

111. Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Gal 3:8; 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18.

112. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 144; Burton, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 107; Bruce, *Galatians*, 180.

113. Hab 2.4 in Gal 3:11; Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12; Deut 21:23 in Gal 3:13; Gen 12:7 in Gal 3:16.

114. De Boer, *Galatians*, 234–235; Keener, *Galatians*, 287; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Baker Academic, 2013), 239.

115. See In-Gyu Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, JSNTSup 81 (JSOT Press, 1993), 122; Michael Winger, 'Meaning and Law', *JBL* 117 (1998): 108, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3266396>.

116. One exception is in 2 Timothy 3:16, but there the use of the singular adjective πᾶσα – thus 'every writing', or 'every scripture' – suggests a reference to each biblical book.

117. Note also the *prosopopoeia* in Rom 10:6-8, where the text of Moses's speech in Deut 30:12-14 is placed in the mouth of 'the righteousness of faith' (ἡ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη). For a discussion of speech-in-character in Galatians 3:8, see Mikeal C. Parsons and Michael W. Martin, *Ancient Rhetoric and the New Testament: The Influence of Elementary Greek Composition* (Baylor University Press, 2018), 164.

118. See Michael Benjamin Cover, 'Paulus als Yischmaelit? The Personification of Scripture as Interpretive Authority in Paul and the School of Rabbi Ishmael', *JBL* 135 (2016): 624–625, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2016.0038>, who also notes the personification of scripture and law in Gal 4:21-31.

might be given by faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe'. In Galatians 3:23, the focus shifts from 'all things' confined under sin by the scripture to 'we' who 'were guarded under the law, locked up until the faith about to be revealed' (3:23). The first-person plural points to Jews,¹¹⁹ especially believing Jews, given that they are portrayed as having been under the custodianship of the law until Christ.¹²⁰

3.2 The personification of faith in Galatians 3:23-25

Stafford notes that 'The only way to distinguish a personification ... is by looking at the context.'¹²¹ Given the personification of both scripture and sin (and probably also of faith) in Galatians 3:22, the reader is further prepared to anticipate something similar in the following verses.¹²² And since the law is personified in Galatians 3:23-25, it is likely that Paul is doing the same thing with faith. Paul uses verbs of movement and revelation: faith has come (ἔρχομαι, 3:23,25), and has been revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω, 3:23), with the coming of Christ.¹²³ It is this same faith by which justification happens (3:24). Paul can use ἀποκαλύπτω to refer to eschatological events and unveilings,¹²⁴ but also for the revelation of persons, such as the revelation of Christ to Paul in Galatians 1:16.¹²⁵ He understands the coming of Christ and related phenomena

119. Contra D. F. Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians: A Text-Centred Rhetorical Analysis of a Pauline Letter*, WUNT 2/190 (Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 182.

120. See Betz, *Galatians*, 148; Michael Bachmann, *Antijudaismus im Galaterbrief? Exegetische Studien zu einem polemischen Schreiben und zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus*, NTOA 40 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 187, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666539404>; John W. Taylor, 'The Eschatological Interdependence of Jews and Gentiles in Galatians', *TynBul* 63 (2012): 295–298, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29352>.

121. Stafford, 'Personification', 72.

122. Paul's use of personification is sometimes recognised, though exactly what is personified by πίστις is still disputed: Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, 1st American ed. (Fortress Press, 1971), 83; Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 200; Hung-sik Choi, 'ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Galatians 5:5-6: Neglected Evidence for the Faithfulness of Christ', *JBL* 124 (2005): 474, <https://doi.org/10.2307/30041035>; Schliesser, 'Christ-Faith', 279; Schliesser, 'Faith in Early Christianity', 20; Downs and Lappenga, *Faithfulness*, 101; Hagen Pifer, *Faith as Participation*, 129).

123. Paul also personifies sin with a verb of movement: 'Sin entered into the world' (Rom 5:12).

124. Rom 1:17-18; 8:18; 1 Cor 2:10; 3:13; Eph 3:5; Phil 3:15. He can use the noun form ἀποκάλυψις in similar ways: Rom 2:5; 16:25; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 2:2; Eph 3:3; 1 Thess 1:7.

125. Also 2 Thess 2:3-8, and cf. Luke 17:30. The cognate noun ἀποκάλυψις (revelation) is used with a personal object in Rom 8:19, 1 Cor 1:7, 2 Cor 12:1, and Gal 1:12.

as revelatory events.¹²⁶ Galatians 3:23-5 brings the coming of faith into that apocalyptic orbit.¹²⁷ Faith – in Christ – is personified as an arriving deliverer, setting Israel free from its confinement under the custodianship of the law.

Von Dobbeler points out that the metaphors used from 3:15–4:7 derive mostly from the realm of the family: sons (3:26; 4:6-7), father (4:6), will/testament (3:15-17), inheritance (3:18), heirs (3:29; 4:1,7), custodian (3:24-25).¹²⁸ To this list of household-related metaphors we might add slave, master (4:1), stewards and managers (4:2). Von Dobbeler looks for a way in which personified πίστις might fit within that domain. He argues that Jewish personification of σοφία (wisdom) as a mother figure became a model which Christians followed with πίστις, citing second-century Christian authors personifying faith as a mother,¹²⁹ and Gnostic identification of wisdom and faith.¹³⁰ However, nothing in Paul's personification of faith evokes a parallel with wisdom or with a mother figure. The household metaphors and indeed the whole discussion from 2:15–4:30 point not so much to the picture of a family with father and mother, but to inheritance. Paul lays out how the ancestral Abrahamic inheritance, instituted by divine covenant – including the promises of blessing, justification, the Holy Spirit, life, and adoption – is received. The inheritance comes to Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, and in him those who through faith become sons of God, whether Jew or Gentile (3:19,26-28; 4:5-7). It does not come through the law, but through faith in the Messiah (2:15-20; 3:1-14,22-26). Therefore it is inherently Christocentric.

Martyn pointed out that a key question in Galatians is 'What time is it?'¹³¹ Paul emphasises the change of era from 'the present evil age' (1:4) to the 'new creation' (6:15). He talks of faith coming and being revealed at a point in time, which is of course the messianic moment, the time of the coming of Christ

126. Rom 3:21; 16:26; 1 Cor 12:7; 2 Cor 4:10-11; Eph 3:19; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:3.

127. Something similar is likely happening in Rom 1:16-17. Paul takes the growth of faith among the Gentiles as evidence of the revelation of divine righteousness through the gospel (Taylor, 'From Faith to Faith', 346).

128. Von Dobbeler, 'Metaphernkonflikt und Missionsstrategie', 20.

129. Polycarp says that faith, as taught by Paul to the Philippians 'is the mother of us all' (Pol. *Phil* 3.2-3). In 'The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and Liberian', according to Hierax, 'Christ is our true father', while 'faith in him is our mother' (Recension B, 4.8, Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, OECT (Clarendon Press, 1972), 50-51).

130. Von Dobbeler, 'Metaphernkonflikt und Missionsstrategie', 30-31.

131. Martyn, *Galatians*, 573.

(3:19,24; 4:4).¹³² The law had constituted and constructed the relationship Israel had with God, but the law was not ‘of faith’ (3:12). In the new messianic era, that relationship is constituted through faith in Christ. Thus, an essential aspect of the argument is the difference in mode of relationship to God between the old and new eras.

Paul establishes that Jews like himself are not justified through the law but through faith, and in Christ have been redeemed from the law and its curse (2:15-21; 3:10-14; 4:1-5). He pictures the law as the temporary custodian of Israel until the revelation of faith and the coming of Christ: ‘Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, guarded until the coming faith would be revealed. So the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith’ (Gal. 3:23-24). The temporary nature of the era of the law, the time before faith came, is described in two parallel prepositional phrases beginning with εἰς: ‘until the coming faith would be revealed’, and ‘until Christ’. Older exegesis of this passage, following Luther, saw εἰς in 3:24 as telic. In this view, the goal of the law was to lead people to Christ. Burton argues that for εἰς to be temporal it should be followed by a temporal term.¹³³ Hunn says that συγκλείω with εἰς usually means ‘confined in’ whatever is the object of the preposition.¹³⁴ But Jews were hardly confined *within* faith in Christ. And the use in 3:23-25 of temporal language including μέλλω (‘going to’), πρὸ τοῦ (‘before’), and οὐκέτι (‘no longer’), provides sufficient context for εἰς to be read as ‘until’.

Paul personifies the law as ‘our custodian’ before faith came, so that ‘we [Jews] might be justified by faith’. Although the παιδαγωγός, the custodian – usually a slave who watched over (wealthy) Greek boys until their maturity – was a figure sometimes lampooned on the Greek stage for roughness or stupidity, the primary sense of the personification here is the law as a temporary restrictive or protective custodian for Israel.¹³⁵ Paul’s conclusion is that Israel is now released from the law: ‘But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian’ (Gal 3:25). A similar temporal idea follows in

132. Betz, *Galatians*, 175; N. H. Young, ‘ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟΣ: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor’, *NovT* 29 (1987): 174, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853687X00047>.

133. Burton, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 199.

134. Debbie Hunn, ‘Does the Law Condemn the World? Law, Sin, and Faith in Galatians 3,22–23’, *ZNW* 106 (2015): 256–260, <https://doi.org/10.1515/znw-2015-0015>.

135. The view of the παιδαγωγός ‘as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ’ (KJV, cf. NASB) is no longer viable. The παιδαγωγός was a child minder or custodian, not a teacher, despite the English term ‘pedagogue’. See Betz, *Galatians*, 177; Dunn, *Galatians*, 198; T. D. Gordon, ‘A Note on ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟΣ in Galatians 3:24–25’, *NTS* 35 (1989): 152, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500024553>; Keener, *Galatians*, 291–293; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 261–267; Young, ‘Social Setting’, 171.

4:1-7, where life under the law is likened to a childhood under stewards and guardians, no different to slavery, until the appointed day set by the father.¹³⁶ Israel was confined under the law *until* God sent his Son to redeem those under the law (4:4-5).

The two verbs συγκλείω and φρουρέω in 3:23 work together, the former indicating confinement, and the latter being guarded. Both the personification of the law as custodian, and the following analogy of the law to household stewards and managers (3:23-25; 4:1-5), point to benevolent confinement. Paul saw the law as providing protective custody for Israel, but this custody was nevertheless a very real imprisonment. In Galatians, the law is equated with the elements of the world (4:3). It failed to bring life (3:21). It bore children for slavery (4:24). Those imprisoned still needed a deliverer. Their confinement lasted until the coming of Christ, so that Jews could be justified by faith. Thus the law kept Israel both from faith, and for faith. Paul talks of faith as coming and being revealed because he sees the coming of faith-in-Christ as an eschatological event which releases Israel from its benevolent confinement under the law, so as to receive the promised inheritance. Faith is a deliverer, once hidden but now revealed. It is portrayed in apocalyptic terms as coming, and being revealed, to deliver Israel, and through the deliverance of Israel, to make Gentiles also into heirs of Abraham (3:27-29) – but it is still faith.¹³⁷ Thus faith in 3:22-26 is personified as an agent of divine eschatological blessing, through a series of prepositional phrases with ἐκ and διὰ. The promise is given

136. Under Roman law, a son did not become an heir until the ceremonial coming of age (J. Albert Harrill, 'Coming of Age and Putting on Christ: The *Toga Virilis* Ceremony, its Paraenesis, and Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Galatians', *NovT* 44 (2002): 275, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853602320249473>).

137. Personification of faith did not stop with Paul. In the Apostolic Fathers, see 1 Clem. 22.1; Barn. 1.4; Ign. Eph. 8.2; 9.1; Herm. Mand. 1.11 (26); Herm. Vis. 3.8.3-7 (16), Herm. Sim. 9.15.2 (92); Pol. Phil. 3.2-3. An epitaph from Phrygia, likely a very early Christian inscription (c. AD 200), describes the journeys of a disciple named Aberkios. It may combine the personification of πίστις together with a connection to Paul: 'Having Paul in the carriage, Faith led the way everywhere' (Παῦλον ἔχων ἐπ' ὄ[χ]ω) Πίστις π[ί]αντη δὲ προῆγε]. Wischmeyer, whose reconstructed text serves as the standard edition for recent discussion of the inscription, sees πίστις here in the role of a *praecursor*, but the succeeding lines portray faith not only leading the way, but nourishing and feeding (Wolfgang Wischmeyer, 'Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm', *JAC* 23 (1980), 41–42). See also R. A. Kearsley, 'The Epitaph of Aberkios: The Earliest Christian Inscription?', in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 6: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1980–81*, ed. S. R. Llewelyn (Eerdmans, 1992), 177–181; and Paul McKechnie, *Christianizing Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 147–165, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108686921.008>.

by faith (3:22), justification is by faith (3:24), and all believers are now sons of God through faith (3:26). A similar temporal idea follows in 4:1-7, where life under the law is likened to a childhood under stewards and guardians, no different from slavery, until the day appointed by the father. Israel was confined under the law *until* God sent his Son to redeem those under the law (4:4-5), and the Gentiles are also made sons and therefore heirs (4:6-7).

4. Conclusion

Personification was a commonplace and yet useful device in ancient literature, often simply expressed. It makes few demands on readers; authors can use it without much elaboration. On the other hand, the alternative proposals for understanding the coming of faith in Galatians 3:23-25 ask the reader to supply a lot to the text to have it make sense. Simplicity, however, is not the only benefit of the reading outlined here. Understanding πίστις in Galatians 3:23-25 as faith personified overcomes several problems that interpreters meet. It explains how faith fits into the discussion in Galatians along with other entities, including sin, scripture, and the law. In this grand drama, faith is given cosmic significance, as an eschatological deliverer. It accounts for the apocalyptic thrust of Paul saying that faith has now come and been revealed as the agent of divine deliverance and blessing, without losing its character as faith. It allows for the article before πίστις in 3:23 to point back in intelligible fashion to ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in 3:22, and for each use of πίστις in the passage to have the same meaning. It is not that no one ever trusted God before, but that faith-in-Christ has come, and this faith, and not law, is the mode of relationship to God in the new creation. Paul is celebrating the fact that Jews like him are no longer under the custodianship of the law, because faith is here. It is this faith by which Jews, and by implication Gentiles, are delivered and justified.

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