

GRAMMAR OF GALATIANS 2:20

GRACE NOTEBOOK

Grammar of Galatians 2:20

By John Woodward

Question:

...I need you to help with the interpretation of the last phrase in Galatians 2:20: "I live by faith **in** the Son of God," or is it " I live by the faith **of** the Son of God " Our discipleship group is looking for an answer to this as the meaning is very different depending on the translation.

Response:

1. The meaning: by faith "**of**"... in Galatians 2:20

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith **of** the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20, KJV.

The mood of the Greek noun for "faith" is Genitive. It would be nice if the Greek grammar was very obvious, but sometimes the use of a mood has several possibilities, and the interpreter needs to judge it from the use of the word and the context.

The N.T. Greek form of this noun translated with "of" can mean "belonging to." This first option is called the *Subjective Genitive*. Examples: Matt. 24:27: 'coming of the Son of Man' = 'Son of Man comes.' Acts 12:11 'expectation of the Jewish people' = 'Jewish people expected.' In this case it would refer to they way Christ demonstrated His perfect humanity by modeling complete trust in the Father. The Abundant Life is based on Christ's perfect redemption that was accomplished as He maintained complete faith. Consider Psalm 22:4-10 as a prophetic description of this: [Messiah is speaking]

"Our fathers trusted in You;
They trusted, and You delivered them.
They cried to You, and were delivered;
They trusted in You, and were not ashamed...
All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
"He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"
But You are He who took Me out of the womb;
You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts.
I was cast upon You from birth.
From My mother's womb You have been My God. "

This kind of *trust* is the ideal of the "exchange" that He calls us to. This dynamic is discussed in Grace Note, "How Did Jesus do What He Did?"

Another possibility is the rendering of the **NKJV**: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith **in** the Son of God, who

loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20, NKJV.

In this translation another use of the [Greek mood] Genitive is conveyed. This is the *Objective Genitive*. Examples: Matt. 12:31 'blasphemy of the Spirit' = 'blaspheming (against) the Spirit'. Luke 11:42 'neglected ...love of God' = 'neglected love for God'.

This use would denote the teaching that the Lord's *disciples are to fully trust in Christ to live in and through them*.

Eph. 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts *by faith*; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,...

Rom. 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from *faith to faith*: as it is written, The just shall live *by faith*.

2 Cor. 5:7 (For we walk *by faith*, not by sight:)

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it *abide in the vine*; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

Gal. 3:5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of [objective genitive = *believing what you heard*] faith?

Gal. 5:5,6 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness *by faith*. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but *faith* working through love.

This latter choice is the view of respected Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson: "Which is **in the Son of God**(*thi tou uiou tou yeou*). The *objective genitive*, not the faith of the Son of God." [1]

The grammar could be interpreted either way.

But, (happily) we have a third option. Another use of the Genitive is described as the Plenary Genitive. It contains both Subjective and Objective Genitive ideas at the same time. Possibly with deliberate ambiguity. This option is preferred when Both Subjective and Objective seem to fit; they don't contradict, but rather complement each other. Example: 2 Cor. 5:14 'love of *Christ* constrains us' = 'our love for *Christ*' and/or '*Christ's* love for us'. Both are true!

Since options one and two both find support elsewhere in the N.T., I believe the Plenary Genitive is the use in Galatians 2:20. In other words. "We live by the faith *of Christ* [as the basis of His redemptive and sanctifying work in us] and faith *in Christ* [as the One we depend upon for divine enablement and life].

2. The verb tense of "crucified" in Galatians 2:20

Another question related to this key verse concerns the tense of the verb. The JKV translates, "**I am** crucified with Christ..." Other translations read, "**I have been** crucified with Christ..." (NKJV).

In the text of Gal. 2:20 we find the word "sunestaurwmai. Its tense is a special past tense called the "perfect" tense. It means that an action has occurred in the past, was completed, and its effects remain to the present time. In other words, *I have been crucified* (spiritually) with Christ (2000 years ago, made experiential at my conversion), yet this reality also describes my present state (so some translations say "*I am crucified* with Christ"). The Greek grammar indicates that both are true!

A.T. Robertson states here, "*I have been crucified with Christ* (*cristwi sunestaurwmai*). One of Paul's

greatest mystical sayings. Perfect passive indicative of *sustaurow* with the associative instrumental case (*cristwi*). Paul uses the same word in Rom. 6:6 for the same idea. In the Gospels it occurs of literal crucifixion about the robbers and Christ (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32; John 19:32). Paul died to the law and was crucified with Christ. He uses often the idea of dying with Christ (Gal. 5:24; 6:14; Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20) and burial with Christ also (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). No longer I (*ouketi egw*). So complete has become Paul's identification with Christ that his separate personality is merged into that of Christ. This language helps one to understand the victorious cry in Rom. 7:25. It is the union of the vine and the branch (John 15:1-6)."^[2]

May we know and reckon as true this profound verse.

[1,2] *Robertson's Word Pictures* (available with E-Sword <http://www.E-Sword.net>)

The purpose of Grace Notes is to highlight the dynamics of abundant living as summarized in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (NKJV). Hundreds of articles are available online to freely use for personal ministry, newsletters, etc. To find an article by topic, author, or key word, click "Grace Notes"/search at www.GraceNotebook.com. Please pray for God's blessing on this internet ministry.

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Grace Notes editor: Dr. John Woodward

Grace Fellowship International

Founder: Dr. Charles Solomon

P.O. Box 368, Pigeon Forge, TN 37868 USA.

Phone: 865-429-0450 Fax: 865-429-0144

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yearn for the abundant life that Christ promised: 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' (John 10:10).

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