

The Greek Geek Corner

“Faith” Followed by a Noun in the Genitive Case

This is not everyone’s cup of tea. It is meant for people who like to do a deeper study of God’s Word.

Paul used the word “faith” (πίστις) about 140 times in his NT writings (if you exclude Hebrews).

Sometimes “faith” is followed by a personal pronoun in the genitive case. There are many examples of this. These tend to be subjective genitives.

- Colossians 1:4 “your faith in Christ Jesus” (τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).
- Colossians 2:5 “your faith in Christ” (τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν)

Our interest is in “faith” followed by nouns in the genitive case.

Section 1: Here are verses that follow a strong pattern.

“Through” (διὰ) or “by” (ἐκ) is followed by “faith” (πίστις) without an article followed by “Jesus” or “Christ” or “Jesus Christ” in the genitive without an article. These are all taken as objective genitives. If they were subjective genitives, what would it mean that Jesus had faith or Jesus believed? I theorize that is why the examples below are all taken as objective genitives.

- Romans 3:22 “through faith in Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)
- Romans 3:26 “of the one who has faith in Jesus” (τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ). A more wooden translation would be “the one by faith in Jesus”.
- Galatians 2:16a “through faith in Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)
- Galatians 2:16b “by faith in Christ” (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ)
- Galatians 3:22 “by faith in Jesus Christ” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)
- Philippians 3:9 “through faith in Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ)

Section 2: These verses do not exactly fit the pattern of Section 1.

- Ephesians 3:12 “through faith in him” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ). Faith has the definite article. This is a personal pronoun in the genitive and not a noun, so it technically does not meet our criteria. “Him” obviously refers to Christ.
- Philippians 1:27 “the faith of the gospel” ESV (τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). There is no preposition before “faith”. “Faith” is in the dative case. Both “faith” and “Gospel” have the definite article. Most translations don’t take a position on whether “Gospel” is subjective or objective. The subject / object also does not fit the pattern – “Gospel” and not “Christ”.
- Colossians 2:12 “through faith in the powerful working” ESV (διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας). Both “faith” and “work” have the definite article. If “faith” was followed by “God”, we would have a pattern closer to the ones in Section 1. But if “work” is taken as objective, then their faith was in “the work” and not in “God” directly.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13 “through ... belief in the truth” ESV, “through ... belief of the truth” KJV (ἐν ... πίστει ἀληθείας). The preposition is removed and is different from the two prepositions used in Section 1. “Faith” is in the dative case. Instead of “Jesus”, we have “truth”. There is no definite article used in this phrase but the translators add one before “truth”. What is interesting is that in the same phrase, the first genitive is taken as subjective and the second genitive is taken as objective. ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας.
- Titus 1:1 “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect” (κατὰ πίστιν ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ). We have a different preposition and thus “faith” is in the accusative case. The subject / object is “the elect” and not “Jesus”. This is generally understood to be a subjective genitive. God’s elect believe / have faith. God’s elect are not the objects of faith.

Section 3: Here are some genitive nouns following faith that are typically translated as subjective genitives.

- Romans 3:3 “Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?” (μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ καταργήσῃ;). Usually πίστις is translated as “faith”. It can also be translated as “faithfulness” although it is rare in Paul. “God” is a subjective genitive in this verse.
- Romans 4:12 “the faith, while uncircumcised, of our father Abraham” (τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ). This is a subjective genitive after “faith”.

Those are all the example of “faith” followed by a noun in the genitive in Paul’s NT writings. What is the bottom line? Many commentators translate Colossians 2:12 as an objective genitive because they say it follows Paul’s pattern. They mention the verses in Section 1, but don’t mention all the verses in Sections 2 and 3. I don’t think Colossians 2:12 fits Paul’s pattern found in Section 1. I think it needs to be evaluated on its own like the other verses in Sections 2 and 3. “Working of God” may be an objective genitive. I propose that those who do not believe “working of God” is an objective genitive are not breaking any of Paul’s grammatical patterns. See Blass Debrunner, Sect 163 and the discussion of “righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ). See Romans 3:21, etc. God is the originator of righteousness. Based on this usage by Paul, why can’t we understand Colossians 2:12b to mean “faith by the work of God”. Congratulations if you have read all of this. You get a gold star.