

# THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD IN GALATIANS 2:20 BEING THE INITIATING SOURCE AND CONTINUING SUPPLY FOR THE BELIEVERS' ORGANIC UNION WITH CHRIST

BY JOHN PESTER

Given the historic significance of Martin Luther's revelation and propagation of the truth of justification by faith rather than by works, the role of a believer's faith in this justifying process has been viewed largely as an act of believing in the objective elements of Christ's person and work. This action, although important in explaining the initial experience of salvation, is incomplete in its ability to account for the subjective role of the faith of the Son of God in the justifying process. Recent biblical scholarship has begun to emphasize the subjective aspect of faith, acknowledging the possibility of two interpretations of the role of faith in Galatians 2:20. The slow movement toward more forcefully acknowledging a subjective role for faith involving the faith of the Son of God is due largely to the failure to see Paul's deeper teaching in his Epistles related to the believers' organic union with Christ, a subjective but mystical union that derives from the faith of Christ, which serves as the initiating source and continuing supply for the believers' organic union with Christ.

## Two Translations Related to Faith in Galatians 2:20

The shortage in seeing Paul's deeper teaching concerning an organic union between the Triune God and redeemed humanity is exemplified in an ongoing debate over whether *Son of God* in Galatians 2:20 should be translated as a subjective genitive using the phrase *the faith of the Son of God* or as an objective genitive using the phrase *faith in the Son of God*. When considered objectively, the prepositions typically employed are *in* or *by*, but when considered subjectively, the preposition typically employed is *of*.<sup>1</sup> Behind the widespread acceptance of commentators and believers that *faith* points to the Son of God as the object in whom we believe, involving only an objective acknowledgment of Christ and His redemptive work, is the misguided thought that faith and the act of "believing" involve a willful choice based on rational apologetic arguments or emotional ministerial appeals.<sup>2</sup> Most commentators deny this. For example, in *Galatians*, volume 19 of his New Testament commentary series, John MacArthur says, "**Faith in Christ** is not mere intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus died and rose for man's sin but is personal trust in His death to remove and forgive one's own sins. It is total commitment to submit to Him as Lord" (57). MacArthur's explanation of what faith is not is accurate, but his attempt to define what faith is, is less successful, because he can employ only spiritualized language that implicitly reinforces the view that faith is still an issue of a willful self-choosing. After his emphatic assertion that faith is not the issue of "intellectual assent," MacArthur forwards the notion that faith is based on "personal trust" and a "total commitment to submit." The call for "trust" and "commitment" implicitly reinforces the thought that faith depends upon personal choices rather than being an irreversible response to hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation, one that bestows the Spirit upon us as the blessing of Abraham (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 3:14). The apportionment of faith to every believer is not based on a personal commitment to trust and submit; it has been given to all who have been justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:24; 12:3).

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In volume 4 of his commendable commentary, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, J. N. Darby also advances an objective interpretation of Galatians 2:20, saying, “By faith in Jesus Christ Paul lived indeed. The Christ who was the source of his life, who was his life, was it object also. It is this which always characterises the life of Christ in us; He Himself is its object—He alone” (349). Although Darby acknowledges a subjective relationship with Christ, especially in his use of the phrase *his life*, it is clear from the context of his explication that Christ is the object rather than the subject of faith. What is a seemingly subjective interpretation of faith is largely objective in its ultimate presentation.

In commenting on Galatians 2:20 in *Govett on Galatians*, Robert Govett states that “the new element in which the son of God lives” is faith, a faith that is focused on the Son of God as a “new object before him” (54). This statement takes Christ as the object of a son of God’s faith, and, hence, is rendered typically as “faith in Christ.” To be sure, Christ is associated with faith in an objective sense, particularly in relation to the truth of His person, being both divine and human, and His work, including His embodiment of divinity in humanity through incarnation (John 1:14), His redeeming death on the cross (Gal. 3:13), and His life-imparting resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3). Paul points to one aspect of these objective elements—Christ’s redeeming death on the cross—in his question to the Galatians: “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed crucified?” (Gal. 3:1). Because Paul’s portrayal of Christ’s crucifixion to the Galatians necessarily involves an objective presentation, most Christians simply accept the translation of *Son of God* as an objective genitive related to the formation of faith. The very next verse, however, speaks of the subjective formation of faith, also in the form of a question: “This only I wish to learn from you, Did you receive the Spirit out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?” (v. 2). The hearing of faith that results in receiving the Spirit imparts the faith of Christ that subjectively vitalizes and applies the objective elements being portrayed in the word of Christ: “Faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Many read *word of Christ* as “the Word of God,” the *logos* (λόγος) Word in the Bible, and thus, associate the hearing of faith only with an acceptance of objective facts concerning Christ contained in the Bible. However, in the Greek text *word* is *rhema* (ῥῆμα), His instant, living, and operative words. *The word of Christ* intrinsically points to Christ as the subjective source of faith. The word of Christ is Christ speaking instant rhema words through speakers using particular and often varied spiritual words initiated by Christ’s faith during a divinely arranged instance of speaking the contents of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:13). Consequently, the hearing of faith involves much more than a mere objective comprehension and acknowledgement of “portrayed” facts.<sup>3</sup> According to most translations, the faith that we hear in Galatians 2:20 is focused on the Son of God as the object of our faith. However, such an objective translation involves a difficult choice because most translators acknowledge that the Greek text allows for a subjective reference to the actual faith of Christ. This possibility forces translators to make a choice. In *The Epistle to the Galatians*, James D. G. Dunn illustrates just such a choice, saying, “The latter phrase [*in the Son of God*] is more cumbersome than usual...and again makes better sense as ‘faith in the Son of God’ than ‘by the faith (fulness) which is of the Son of God’” (146). Dunn’s choice and that of other commentators hinges typically on their particular doctrinal perspective on the formation of faith in the Christian life. Although an objective and subjective translation seem to be mutually exclusive, they, in fact, are inclusive in experience: the instant rhema words of Christ convey the objective content of our faith through spiritual words that are spoken in Christ and that originate from the faith of Christ. In *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Galatians*, George R. Brunk III acknowledges the possibility of translating *Son of God* either as an objective or subjective genitive, saying,

Either of these translations of the Greek is possible...Since the publication of the Revised Standard Version in the late 1940s, the translation *faith in Jesus Christ* has been so dominant that most readers are not aware of any option, despite the fact that the King James Version translated many of these expressions *faith of Jesus Christ*. Both translations clearly reflect Pauline and New Testament truth expressed elsewhere. Christians express faith (i.e., they

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believe) in Christ to receive right standing with God...On the other hand, our right standing is based on the faithful, obedient action of Jesus Christ (Rom 5:19; Phil 2:6-8). In Paul's theology this two-sided truth<sup>4</sup> is the basis for right standing (justification) with God. (117)

In *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, Ben Witherington III summarizes the level of support for each translation, noting that those who hold to reading it as a subjective genitive are in the relative minority, but that their ranks are growing. He speaks also of the crucial distinction involved in regarding *faith* in Galatians 2:20 as referring to *the Son of God* as either an objective or subjective genitive, a distinction that addresses whether the source of faith in the divine economy is the believer or the Son of God:

Should the phrase, which if translated literally reads 'faith of Christ', be taken as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive? This has been a matter of no little scholarly debate in the last fifteen years, and to judge from the recent articles and commentaries on Galatians the debate is not abating. It is fair to say at this point that scholars, at least in North America, are fairly evenly divided on the objective versus subjective genitive issue, whereas it is a minority view elsewhere that we should take the phrase as involving a subjective genitive. Briefly summarized, the objective genitive view involves taking the phrase to mean the faith of which Christ is the object, and so faith in Christ, while the subjective genitive view refers to Christ's own faith or faithfulness. (179)

The debate over whether to use *faith in the Son of God* or *faith of the Son of God* in Galatians 2:20 is not a debate about whether one translation is right and the other wrong. It is a debate over which one deserves more emphasis since only one can be utilized, and it is a debate over the implications of advancing one over the other. In *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1—4:11*, Richard B. Hays speaks of witnessing

a profuse upspringing of new advocates for the claim that πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Paul means "the faith of Jesus Christ." Even many who do not accept this particular interpretation have called for a reopening of the question. Why should this be so? I would suggest that the nature of the evidence requires it: "Faith in Jesus Christ" is not the most natural translation of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; once the question has been raised, it is understandable that critics should seek a more satisfying interpretation. Particularly in a time when the fundamental contours of Pauline thought are being reassessed, it is not surprising that the meaning of this expression should be under discussion. (147; see footnote 105 on page 147 for a list of new advocates)

Hays associates the "reopening of the question" with a broader reassessment of the "fundamental contours of Pauline thought." Such a broader reassessment is exemplified by the Finnish School led by Tuomo Mannermaa of Helsinki University (see *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson). Mannermaa posits that a union with Christ is a real but mystical issue of Christ Himself being present in faith. Such a presence links this union-producing faith to the faith of the Son of God, supporting the use of *the Son of God* as a subjective genitive in verse 20. However, until a broader reassessment of Pauline thought extends to a more comprehensive and cohesive interpretation of the Pauline texts in the New Testament, there will be resistance to emphasizing *the faith of the Son of God* over *the faith in the Son of God* in 2:20. A shift from a largely judicial emphasis on justifying faith to one that fosters a view based on a believer's actual oneness with Christ through an organic union (1 Cor. 6:17) will be slow in coming to greater prominence. Such slowness is due to a general failure in current Christian scholarship to see the economy of God that imparts the eternal life of the Triune God through faith and that, subsequently, operates to bring the believers to maturity as the corporate Body of Christ, the organic fullness of the One who fills all in all (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:22-23).

Because his charge from the Lord was "to enlighten all that they may see what the

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economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (3:9), all of Paul’s writings emphasize the economy of God. While his organic, economic focus can be readily seen in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 1—6, and Colossians 1—3, it is equally present in Galatians. Paul does not address the inadequacies of the law in Galatians to just affirm God’s ordained procedure for judicial justification based on faith. Paul’s ultimate intention was to foster a deeper understanding of the way in which the divine life is given and subsequently operates to produce and build up a corporate, organic Body of Christ as the household of the faith (3:22; 6:10). The giving of life and its ongoing operation are according to God’s economy, which is based on faith (1 Tim. 1:4), the faith of the Son of God first and foremost. Such an understanding provides additional crucial support for modifying the emphasis in Galatians 2:20 from *the faith in the Son of God*, which is judicial and objective in nature, to *the faith of the Son of God*, which corresponds to a view of faith that affirms the reality of the believers’ organic union with the Lord.

### Paul’s Organic Focus in Galatians

A willingness to more emphatically stress the use of *Son of God* as a subjective genitive in verse 20 has been frustrated by a failure to see Paul’s emphasis on the organic operation of the divine life of Christ in Galatians. This operation involves an initial organic experience of Christ being revealed in a believer (1:15-16), an ongoing organic experience of Christ living in a believer (2:20), and a culminating organic experience of Christ being formed in a believer (4:19). This operation is both individual and corporate, and it ultimately issues in an organic household of the faith (6:10).

In order to highlight this operation, Paul establishes the primacy of the divine life over the law by speaking of the inability of the law, even if it could be fulfilled, to enact the promise of life given to Abraham, the promise of the life-supplying Spirit being given to those who are of the faith of Christ (3:6-26). The intrinsic function of the law is to make demands that expose the weakness of the flesh and, hence, to conduct God’s chosen to Christ, who is life (v. 24; John 1:4; 11:25). In Galatians 3:6-26 there is an implicit contrast between the law and the divine life, a contrast that is at the core of Paul’s organic focus. This contrast is explicitly seen in verse 21, which says, “If a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would have indeed been of law.” In this verse Paul refers to law generally, but in the context of verses 6 through 26, he no doubt includes the law of God. It is not the function of the law to give life. There is only one person who fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law in His living and through His death on the cross—Christ, but even in His righteous fulfillment of the law in His living, He could only say, “I have come that they *may* have life” (John 10:10, emphasis added). His fulfillment of the righteous requirement of the law addressed the problem of sin before God through His death on the cross, but His death did not result in the immediate enlivening of the disciples. This occurred only after He appeared to the disciples on the day of His resurrection and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22). The giving of life was realized only after Christ, as the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45). Giving life is a matter of resurrection, not death, even though the two are related, with *last Adam* referring to His death and *life-giving Spirit* referring to His resurrection. However, between these two terms there is the word *became*, which indicates a distinction between the satisfaction of God’s righteous requirement of the law through death and the giving of life through resurrection.

Paul does not argue against justification by works of law merely for the sake of advancing an accurate understanding of the judicial basis for justification. He is more concerned with advancing an understanding of the organic application of God’s salvation, a salvation that depends upon the divine life being given in an economy that is sourced in the life and living faith of Christ rather than the law. The inability of the law to give life is an inherent deficiency in the nature of the law; this inability, however, is often attributed only to the presence of sin and the weakness of the flesh (Rom. 8:3), which implicitly, but mistakenly,

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suggests that sinless adherence to the law would result in life. Kenneth S. Wuest, in *Galatians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, illustrates this view, saying,

No law could give eternal life. The wages of sin is death. The law demands of the sinner the death penalty, spiritual and physical death. The law will not accept the good works of a sinner in lieu of the death penalty. Only the precious blood of Jesus could satisfy the righteous demands of the broken law. (108)

Even though the weakness of a believer's flesh makes the fulfillment of the law an impossibility, it is the inherent inability of a law to give life that is at the root of Paul's contrasting of the law and life. In *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, R. C. H. Lenski comments on Galatians 3:21, saying, "Law' in general (no article), thus also the Mosaic law but equally all other law lacks the ability 'to make alive' (aorist, punctiliar), to produce spiritual life" (173). He then affirms, "The very idea of a law producing life is a contradiction" (174). Govett takes the same position, saying, "Law demands, but gives not. The Gospel gives life in both senses: (1) it bestows spiritual life toward God in regeneration; and (2) eternal life in resurrection, as the gift of God through the righteousness of Christ" (94). Witherington locates the inability of the law to give life in its true function to expose and condemn:

The verb ἐδόθη ('had been given'), suggests again that the Law he has in mind originates with God. But even so, this Law was not able to make a fallen sinful person alive (ζωοποιῆσαι), which was what was needed, only the Spirit could do that (cf. 2 Cor. 3.6). This was not the purpose of the Law, indeed the effect of the Law on fallen persons was quite the opposite of making live. (259)

Even though the condemning law cannot give life, it serves to advance God's intended purpose of giving life in resurrection by conducting the believers to the life-giving One. This is the reason that Paul says that the law is not against the promises of God (Gal. 3:21). Indeed, through the child-conducting function of the law, the giving of life by Christ as the life-giving Spirit is made possible. In *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Joseph Agar Beet comments on the giving of life in verse 21b, noting,

*Give-life*: same word in Rom. iv. 17, viii. 11, 1 Cor. xv. 22, 36, 45, 2 Cor. iii. 6; [John] v. 21, vi. 63. It denotes here eternal *life*. This is the ultimate design of the Law, Rom. vii. 10: and in Gal. iii. 22 we shall see the design accomplished. But that the *Law* is not of itself *able to give life*, Paul proves by saying that this would involve *righteousness actually derived from law*, which in vv. 10—13 he has shown to be impossible. (95)

Giving life is based on the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, that was given to Abraham. This giving is dependent upon faith (vv. 5, 8, 14). In contrast, the law cannot give life, because it is not of faith (v. 12). The faith that actualizes the promise given to Abraham is the faith of Christ, and this faith is applied in hearing and receiving the faith of Christ in the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 5). Such a hearing does more than objectively position the receiver in a justified standing before God; it imparts the divine life through the Spirit's regeneration of the human spirit: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Those who are born through this joining faith become sons of God in life and nature (Gal. 3:26; John 1:4, 12; 2 Pet. 1:4), which is much more than just being a justified sinner. In Galatians Paul details the proper procedure involved in God's justifying process—faith rather than works of the law—in order to stress the organic issue of justifying faith received through the hearing of faith (3:2, 5). Simply stated, the hearing of faith, which is a hearing of the faith of Christ, produces an organic union between the receiver and the Lord, a union in which two spirits—the human spirit and the divine Spirit—become one spirit organically (1 Cor. 6:17). In the formation and development of this organic union, the faith of the Son of God serves as the initiating source and continuing supply for the believers' organic union with Christ.

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## The Organic Union in Galatians

*Organic union* is a critical term needed in a reassessment, as Hays suggests, of the “fundamental contours of Pauline thought” (147), but it is not a term that appears with any regularity in the scholarship concerning the believers’ union with Christ, with one notable exception—the writings of Witness Lee.<sup>5</sup> Even with an upsurge of interest in the matter of the believers’ union with Christ, the extent of these discussions is limited to the term *union*. That the believers’ union with Christ is discussed is certainly groundbreaking, but it is discussed largely from an ontologically oriented perspective. These discussions also bring the matter of theosis to the forefront, which is another commendable development, but in both cases the discussions related to the terms *union* and *theosis* are shrouded in a dense layer of theological terminology that frustrates simple believers from understanding and practically experiencing this union. In order to realize this union with Christ in actual experience, believers need to know the basis and location of this organic union. Witness Lee speaks to both points in one simple but clear sentence supported by the Scriptures, saying, “When we believe into the Lord Jesus, we experience an organic union with Him. When we believe in Him, we believe into Him and thereby become one spirit with Him. This is what we mean by the expression *organic union*” (187-188). Simply put, the basis for our organic union is our believing into Christ (John 1:12; Rom. 10:14; 1 John 5:13), and the initial<sup>6</sup> location of this union is our human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit as one spirit (John 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). Witness Lee also speaks in a simple way concerning the formation of our organic union with the Lord, saying,

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According to Paul’s Epistles, the Triune God has been processed [through incarnation, death, and resurrection] to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. When this Spirit comes into man’s spirit, an organic union is created...It is crucial that we realize that we have been joined organically to the Triune God. He and we, we and He, are mingled together as one. Such an organic union has taken place in our spirit. (143-144)

The process that the Triune God passed through in Christ involved Christ’s incarnation, which prepared a sinless body to be offered up on a tree through His death for our redemption. It also involved the release, in His resurrection, of the divine life from within the shell of His humanity into many grains (Heb. 10:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; John 12:24). At the end of this process, Christ, as the last Adam, became the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, a Spirit who is able to impart and apply into the believers all the elements of Christ’s person and work. Witness Lee states, “God’s economy is to impart Himself as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit into us to produce an organic union between us and the Triune God so that we may express Him in a corporate way” (137).

Witness Lee’s simple statements about our organic union with the Lord are significant, but his use of the modifier *organic*, which is lacking in other discussions of union with Christ, is equally significant, because it relates to the central revelation of the Bible that God is a living God who desires to impart His uncreated divine life into redeemed humanity for His expression. This emphasis on life is present throughout the New Testament: God, as the living God, desires to give us His uncreated divine life (1 Tim. 4:10). To this end, the One in whom was life came to give His life in abundance (John 1:4; 10:10). He gives the life in Himself to whom He wills (5:21, 26). The Scriptures were written that we may have life in His name (20:31). The Spirit gives life (6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). We are charged to speak the words of this life (Acts 5:20). The righteous have life and live by faith (Rom. 1:17). We are saved in life, reign in life, and walk in newness of life (5:10, 17; 6:4). Eternal life in Christ Jesus is the gift of God (v. 23). The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Prior to our redemption, we were alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). Names are recorded in the book of life (Phil. 4:3). Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). We can lay hold on the eternal life in this age (1 Tim. 6:12). There is a promise of life in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:1). The hope of eternal life was promised in ages past (Titus 1:2). God’s divine power has granted to us all things related to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). In the beginning the Word was the Word of life (1 John

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1:1). Eternal life abides in us when we love the brothers (3:14-15). We have life and live through Him (4:9). God gave to us the eternal life that is in His Son (5:11). Those who have the Son have the life (v. 12). We can give life to others (v. 16). We are guided to springs of waters of life (Rev. 7:17). And ultimately, there is a river of water of life flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1). The focal point of the New Testament is the operation of the eternal life of the Triune God within every believer to produce an enlarged corporate expression—the church as the organic Body of Christ—manifesting His image and exercising His dominion organically (Gen. 1:26). This life is aptly described by Witness Lee as organic, and the union produced by the union of divinity with redeemed humanity is rightly denoted as an organic union.

**I**n the brief but broad survey of verses from the New Testament above, there is no reference from Galatians, but this does not mean that the organic union based on receiving the eternal life is not present in the Epistle. The references from Galatians below are analogous in content and application to the verses above: There is a living God, as attested to by a seed (3:16). The purpose of Christ coming as faith is to give life and make us sons of God in life and nature (vv. 25-26). He gives His life in abundance through the supplying Spirit (v. 5). He willed to give the promise of life to the son of the free woman but not to the son of the maidservant (4:23). The Scripture announced the gospel of the promise of life (3:8). In his announcement of the gospel, Paul spoke words that imparted life (1:11). The righteous have life and live by faith (3:11). In living by the Spirit, we also walk by the Spirit (5:25). The promise to Abraham was graciously given (3:18). Christ in His humanity became a curse on our behalf and terminated the adamic line (v. 13). We did not know God and were slaves to gods which by nature are not gods (4:8). God keeps an account of what we sow (6:7). Christ is our living (2:20). We do not lose heart in doing what is good (6:9). The fulfillment of the promise of redemption results in life through sonship (4:4-5). The hope of eternal life was promised to Abraham in the Old Testament age (3:8). We can sow unto the Spirit to reap eternal life and all the godly fruits of the Spirit (6:8; 5:22-23). Paul's speaking of the word of Christ was a ministry of life (3:1-2). We restore the brothers in a spirit of meekness (6:1). God revealed the eternal life in His Son in us (1:16). As sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, we are of Christ (3:26, 29). Through love we serve one another (5:13). We are led by the Spirit, live by the Spirit, and walk by the Spirit (vv. 18, 25). And ultimately, we have the grace of life flowing out of the throne of God in our spirit (6:18).

In addition to these analogous verses, the *Life-study of Galatians* speaks particularly about the organic union in its discussion of sonship in Galatians 4. Although *sonship* is typically viewed as being a descriptor depicting only a qualified legal position of an heir, sonship in the divine realm is a position that can be attained only by those who have a mutually shared life. Such a shared life is the result of the divine life being imparted into and joined to us in our enlivened human spirit. Concerning the sonship promised to Abraham, Witness Lee writes,

It is a matter of tremendous significance for the divine life to be imparted into us. This impartation of the divine life causes an organic union which makes us both the sons of God and the sons of Abraham. This organic union takes place exclusively in Christ. In Christ we enjoy the wonderful organic union with the Triune God. In this union we are, on the one hand, the sons of God and, on the other hand, the sons of Abraham. Christ is the unique sphere in which this all takes place. When we enter into this sphere, we become sons of God and sons of Abraham. Our true status is that in Christ and by the organic union we are both sons of God and sons of Abraham. (176)

The focal point of the New Testament is the operation of the eternal life of the Triune God in believers who are regenerated and enlivened sons. This life is aptly described by Witness Lee as organic because life in and of itself is inherently organic in nature. *Organic* is an appropriate explanatory modifier if one desires to be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God concerning the organic union between God and redeemed humanity

ALTHOUGH SONSHIP IS TYPICALLY VIEWED AS BEING A DESCRIPTOR DEPICTING ONLY A QUALIFIED LEGAL POSITION OF AN HEIR, SONSHIP IN THE DIVINE REALM IS A POSITION THAT CAN BE ATTAINED ONLY BY THOSE WHO HAVE A MUTUALLY SHARED LIFE.

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(1 Cor. 4:1-2). And it is an easily understandable modifier for those who are seeking to not live by their own righteousness, which produces only wretched men consumed by a body of death (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 7:24). Although the Triune God's organic life is mysterious, the sense of its absence or presence in experience is not; Paul testifies of this in Romans 7 concerning the experience of sin and death: "Wretched man that I am!" (v. 24) and, subsequently, in chapter 8 concerning the experience of life: "The law of the Spirit of life has freed me" (v. 2).

### *The Faith of the Son of God Being the Initiating Source of the Organic Union*

The faith of the Son of God is the originating source for a believer's experience of God's eternal life in an organic union of divinity and redeemed humanity. Galatians 2:20 speaks of this organic union and of the source of the organic union, saying, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." The phrase *it is Christ who lives in me* speaks to the reality of an organic union involving the mingled living of Christ within a redeemed believer. The phrase *the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God* speaks of the faith of Christ as the source of Paul's organic union with Christ and, by extension, the same organic union of all believers with Christ. Prior to his conversion Paul, as Saul, lived exclusively in the flesh, the good flesh of a religious zealot who felt justified in binding and ravaging those who called on the name of the Lord (Acts 9:14, 21). But when he heard the word of Christ on the road to Damascus, the organic life of Christ was added to and joined with Paul's instantaneously redeemed humanity, as evidenced by his acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord (v. 5), a response that could have come only from one who was in the Holy Spirit by having been organically joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). Through the faith of the Son of God, Paul received a new life—the life of Christ—as another source for his living. This new life served as the basis for the organic union of the divine life of Christ in Paul's human spirit with its righteously redeemed humanity (Rom. 8:10).

The faith of the Son of God is the initiating source of the organic union in the human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit as one. This organic union is the issue of receiving the promise of the Spirit through the faith of the Son of God. This receiving takes place in our regenerated human spirit. Such a mingled spirit is the issue of receiving the promise of the Spirit through the faith of the Son of God: "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). The faith of the Son of God is an eternal faith, but it came as the source of our faith in time and, by extension, the source of our organic union in time: "Before faith came we were guarded under law, being shut up unto the faith which was to be revealed" (v. 23). When faith came, the source of our living changed from our being under the child-conducting function of the law: "Since faith has come, we are no longer under a child-conductor" (v. 25). The law no longer holds sway over us, because the final intended purpose of the law—conducting us to Christ to be organically joined to Him—has been fulfilled through faith in us, the sons of God who share the life and nature of God.

**F**aith is an essential, eternally abiding attribute of God's intrinsic nature (1 Cor. 13:13); He is faithful (2 Cor. 1:18). His faithfulness is expressed toward us but, more importantly, toward Himself and His will that He purposed in Himself (Eph. 1:9). Toward us His faithfulness is manifested in, among other things, His calling for us to participate in the fulfillment of His will (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thes. 5:24), in His not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we are able so that we can advance in the fulfillment of His will (1 Cor. 10:13), in His establishing us and guarding us from the evil one so that we can overcome every satanic obstacle in the fulfillment of His will (2 Thes. 3:3), in His word so that we can be supplied for the fulfillment of His will (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11), in the things pertaining to God so that we will not be short of anything needed for the fulfillment of His will (Heb. 2:17), in His creation so that we can be in divinely



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arranged environments for the fulfillment of His will (1 Pet. 4:19), and in His forgiveness so that we are not hindered in the fulfillment of His will by lingering sins (1 John 1:9).

**F**or God, toward Himself and His will, the divine attribute of faith in His intrinsic, immanent being is confirmed by His inability to deny Himself and His self-identification as I AM WHO I AM (2 Tim. 2:13; Exo. 3:14). His inability to deny Himself and His self-identification are exemplars of His faith, a faith that is grounded in the certainty of who He is, and our participation in this faith comes from receiving the faith of the Son of God. From the source of faith that is God to the initiation of faith in us, the faith of the Son of God is the vital means for the development of an organic union between divinity and redeemed humanity. The initiation of faith occurs through the hearing of faith when the word of Christ is announced (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2). This word penetrates our deadened human spirit, causing us to respond with appreciation and prompting us to call on the Lord. Following our simple calling, we may openly or through spontaneous prayer receive and accept the spiritual content of our hearing, most notably the Lord Jesus Himself and His marvelous work. When we receive and accept, we are joined to the Lord in an organic union, and we begin to partake of Him in the joy of our salvation. These reactions to hearing the word of Christ are so closely related in experience that it is difficult to sequentially distinguish one from another; all these responses seemingly occur spontaneously and simultaneously. A reflection on our personal salvation experience will confirm the presence of these elements involved in the hearing of faith. Witness Lee speaks of these elements, saying,

The subjective aspect of faith implies at least eight items. First, faith involves hearing. Without the hearing of the word, there can be no faith. Faith comes from hearing. The word we hear includes God, Christ, the Spirit, the cross, redemption, salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life. It also includes the fact that God has been processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. According to the New Testament, the gospel tells us of all these matters. When the gospel is preached in a proper way, those who hear it will be stirred up and filled with appreciation. Their hearing of the word of the gospel is the beginning of their believing. The reason Christians are lacking in faith is that their hearing is poor. If they heard a living message on how the Triune God has been processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, no doubt this hearing would produce faith in them.

Second, faith also implies appreciation. After hearing the word of the gospel, a sense of appreciation spontaneously rises up in those who hear. This is true not only of those hearing the gospel for the first time, but for all believers in Christ. Whenever we hear the word in a proper way, this hearing awakens more appreciation for the Lord.

This appreciation is followed by calling, the third item implied in the subjective aspect of faith. All those who appreciate the Lord Jesus will spontaneously call on His name. If our gospel preaching is cold, dull, and dead, it will be necessary to persuade people to pray and call on the Lord's name. But if our preaching is precious, rich, living, inspiring, and stirring, there will be no need to persuade people. Rather, they will spontaneously call, "O Lord Jesus." Perhaps instead of calling on Him in this way, they will utter some word of appreciation for the Lord. Perhaps they will say, "Oh, how good the Lord Jesus is!"

Fourth, faith implies receiving. By appreciating the Lord Jesus and calling on Him, we spontaneously receive Him.

With receiving, we have the fifth aspect, that of accepting. It is possible to receive something without accepting it. Faith involves both receiving and accepting. Those who hear the gospel and appreciate the Lord Jesus automatically accept Him as well as receive Him.

Sixth, faith includes becoming joined to the Lord Jesus. By receiving and accepting Him, we are joined to Him. Then, as the seventh and eighth items, we partake of Him and enjoy Him. Faith partakes of and enjoys what it receives and accepts. (122-123)

THE INITIATION  
OF FAITH OCCURS  
THROUGH THE  
HEARING OF FAITH  
WHEN THE WORD  
OF CHRIST  
IS ANNOUNCED.  
THIS WORD  
PENETRATES OUR  
DEADENED HUMAN  
SPIRIT, CAUSING US  
TO RESPOND WITH  
APPRECIATION AND  
PROMPTING US TO  
CALL ON THE LORD.

PAUL'S REFERENCE  
TO THE FAITH  
OF THE SON OF GOD  
IN 2:20, RATHER THAN  
THE FAITH OF CHRIST,  
INDICATES THAT  
THIS FAITH IS  
THE TRIUNE GOD'S  
ETERNAL ATTRIBUTE  
OF FAITH, WHICH  
SERVES AS THE  
SOURCE OF OUR FAITH  
AND OUR SUBSEQUENT  
ORGANIC UNION WITH  
THE TRIUNE GOD.

The hearing of faith, as described above, is essential for the formation of an organic union between God and redeemed humanity. In this process of formation, hearing is the means, but faith is the vitalizing source. *Faith in the hearing of faith* is not, as many think, just an end result of hearing; it is the initiating source, the beginning. The believers' hearing is a hearing of faith; that is, it is a hearing that is contingent upon the presence of the faith of the Son of God. Faith comes first, but when it is heard in the word of Christ, it justifies new believers by bringing them into an organic union with the Son of God, the righteous Christ. With faith being the initiating source of the organic union, it is not logical or acceptable to assume that faith derives from any person or thing other than the Son of God. Such a thought opens a treacherous door to an argument that there is more than one source of faith.<sup>7</sup> Since this is not possible in the economy of God's salvation, this sourcing faith must be the faith of the Son of God, the faith that is part of His intrinsic being as the eternal Son, the second of the Divine Trinity. Paul's reference to the faith of the Son of God, rather than the faith of Christ, indicates that the faith of which he speaks is the Triune God's eternal attribute of faith, which rightly serves as the source of our faith and our subsequent organic union with the Triune God, a union formed through His imparted and received faith. This fact alone provides crucial contextual support for translating the Greek text in Galatians 2:20 as "the faith of the Son of God" and should be duly noted in the current ongoing reassessment of the broader context of Paul's teaching, which is an economy based on faith (1 Tim. 1:4). In his word to Timothy, Paul exhorts him to charge others not to teach differently (v. 3). Any teaching and, by extension, any translation that is suggestive of two sources of faith—the faith of the Son of God and the other, an unregenerate's "faith"—is a different teaching that violates the economy of God. This argument equally applies to the faith of the Son of God being the continuing supply for the organic union.

### *The Faith of the Son of God Being the Continuing Supply for the Organic Union*

As indicated earlier, the organic union is not a static accomplishment; rather, the organic union is growing and spreading throughout the entire tripartite being of a redeemed and reconciled believer. This organic reconciliation is ongoing (2 Cor. 5:20) through the spreading of the organic union. In order for us to experience this growth, there is a continuing need for access to the supply of the divine life through the faith of the Son of God. This supply is realized as grace (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:5). We need a continuing supply of the faith of the Son of God that issues in grace upon grace (John 1:16). In Galatians 3:5 Paul advances his understanding of the role of the hearing of faith as the means for extending the organic union in a believer by linking it to a continuing supply of faith: "He therefore who bountifully supplies to you the Spirit and does works of power among you, does He do it out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?" With such a supply, "the righteous one shall have life and live by faith" (v. 11). In *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, F. F. Bruce speaks of faith serving as the "bond of union with the risen Christ" (145). The bond of union in which a new believer lives through a continuing supply of faith is "nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in the believer. The risen Christ is the operative power in the new order, as sin was in the old (cf. Rom. 7:17, 20)" (144). Beet says that this supplied life "is in some sense a continuation of Christ's life on earth" (55). Wuest also comments on the source of a believer's new life and living produced by an organic union with the Son of God through the faith of the Son of God:

The new life is no longer, like the former one, dependent upon the ineffectual efforts of a man attempting to draw near to God in his own righteousness. The new life is a Person within a person, living out His life in that person. Instead of attempting to live his life in obedience to a set of rules in the form of the legal enactments of the Mosaic law, Paul now yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit and cooperates with Him in the production of a life pleasing to God, energized by the divine life resident in him through the regenerating work of the Spirit. (82)

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The energizing, the supplying, of the divine life through the organic union follows the same process that initiated our faith: There is further and deeper hearing, appreciating, calling, receiving, accepting, joining, partaking, and enjoying as we let the rhema word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16), furthering the extension of the organic union by enabling Christ to make His home in our hearts through faith and thereby allowing His life to transform, to “rearrange,” the focus and functions of the elements of our soul into His same image (Eph. 3:17; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). In the same way that we received the Spirit through the faith of the Son of God, we are supplied bountifully by the Spirit. The organic union that frames our participation in the economy of God is both sourced and supplied by the faith of the Son of God. Just an objective acknowledgement of objective facts concerning the person and work of Christ is not sufficient to continually supply us with the Spirit. Without experiencing such a supply in our organic union through faith, there is no possibility that we can walk by the Spirit, let alone live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This experiential fact provides further contextual support, in the current ongoing reassessment of the broader context of Paul’s teaching in the New Testament, for translating the Greek text in Galatians 2:20 as “the faith of the Son of God.”

### A Concluding Expression of Appreciation

We praise the Triune God for His economy to organically join Himself with His divine life and nature, including His attribute of faith, with the life and nature of our redeemed humanity. In this economy the word of Christ announces the Father’s purpose and plan to be one with redeemed humanity, resulting in an appreciative and spontaneous calling. In this economy the Son accomplishes the Father’s purpose and plan, initiating an organic union through the generation of a receiving, accepting, and joining response. And in this economy the Spirit applies the Son’s accomplishment of the Father’s purpose and plan, initiating a partaking and enjoying response. The faith of the Son of God, which is conveyed through the hearing of this faith, is the vital source of and continuing supply for the organic union that the Spirit applied, the Son accomplished, and the Father purposed and planned. This is of the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes. **AFC**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>A translation using an objective genitive in verse 20 is included in the American Standard Version, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the New King James Version, and the Revised Standard Version. A translation using a subjective genitive in verse 20 is included in the Common English Bible, Darby’s New Translation, the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible, the King James Version, and the Recovery Version.

<sup>2</sup>This notion of faith encapsulates the heresy of Pelagius, who stressed the primacy of human efforts in obtaining salvation, and although most would not immediately recognize it as such, strains of Pelagianism are found in common refrains related to “taking a leap of faith.” Behind such a leap is the thought that one must blindly set aside personal doubts in favor of accepting a new thought; in this leap there is no thought of faith involving receiving a new life—the eternal life of God. Such a leap is often viewed as a commendable act of faith, but there is a significant negative consequence of embracing this thought: the tendency to “unleap” when confronted with doubts, especially in times of human tragedy. When circumstances arise under the sovereign arrangement of God cause believers to doubt the presence or care of God, it is easy for believers to jettison their “faith.”

<sup>3</sup>Many typically regard Paul’s portrayal as being merely an objective affirmation of Christ’s redemptive death, but I do not think that Paul was of this opinion. Rather, he declares in other places that his speaking of the truth was in Christ (Rom. 9:1). He asserts that his words were spiritual words taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). He acknowledges that his speaking was out of God and in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17). He associates a spirit of faith with his speaking (4:13). He identifies that Christ is speaking in him through a faith that can only be subjectively sourced in Christ (13:3). And he connects his speaking of the gospel, his portrayals of Christ’s person and work, as a speaking in God (1 Thes. 2:2).

<sup>4</sup>The subjective aspect of this two-sided truth is succinctly implied in the designation of Christ

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OF OBJECTIVE FACTS  
CONCERNING THE  
PERSON AND WORK  
OF CHRIST IS NOT  
SUFFICIENT TO  
CONTINUALLY SUPPLY  
US WITH THE SPIRIT.

IN READING  
HEBREWS 12:2,  
MOST BELIEVERS  
TEND TO FOCUS ON  
AND APPRECIATE THE  
LATTER DESIGNATION,  
*PERFECTER*,  
OVERLOOKING THE  
SIGNIFICANCE OF  
THE FORMER  
DESIGNATION,  
*AUTHOR*, WHICH  
SPEAKS OF CHRIST  
AS THE AUTHORIZING  
SOURCE OF FAITH.

as the Author and Perfecter of faith in Hebrews 12:2. When reading Mark 9:24, most believers identify with the father of the demon-possessed dumb child; when this father said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” he was focused on the enfeebled degree of his faith. Thus, in reading Hebrews 12:2, most believers tend to focus on and appreciate the latter designation, *Perfecter*, overlooking the significance of the former designation, *Author*, which speaks of Christ as the authoring source of faith. Without Christ’s faith being the authoring source, there would be no perfecting of faith or any faith for that matter.

<sup>5</sup>Given this notable exception and the need to faithfully advance a practical understanding of the significance of the organic union in the economy of God, the quotations in this section come exclusively from Witness Lee’s *Life-study of Galatians*. Witness Lee first employed this term during a training on Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians in the winter of 1979, indicating that even at such an early date he was, rather than just repeating the common notion that Paul wrote Galatians solely to rebut the thought that justification is possible through works of the law, engaged in a broad assessment of the focus of Galatians, determining that the focus centered on the dispensing of the divine life.

<sup>6</sup>The word *initial* is used intentionally because the operation of the organic union is not a static operation within redeemed humanity; it is an organic operation that should be spreading throughout the entire tripartite being of redeemed believers. In the experience of normal Christians, the operation of the organic union brings them on to maturity (Heb. 6:1), and this maturing process involves the spreading of the divine life from their regenerated human spirit to their soul and ultimately, to their body. This process corresponds to the three stages of the experience of Christ spoken of by Paul in Galatians: The organic union initially reveals Christ in our spirit (1:16); the organic union then transforms the parts of our soul—the mind, emotion, and will—through Christ living in us (2:20); finally, the organic union manifests the formation of Christ that has been taking place progressively in our mortal bodies (4:19).

<sup>7</sup>The faith of the Son of God is the source of faith in the sons of God. In God’s governmental administration, His economy, there can be only one source of faith. If there were a source of faith other than the faith of the Son of God, Christ would not have the first place in all things, and there would be more than one faith (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:5). Both these conditions would invalidate the eternal economy of God.

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