



# What Difference Does a *Preposition* Make?

Faith *in/of* Jesus

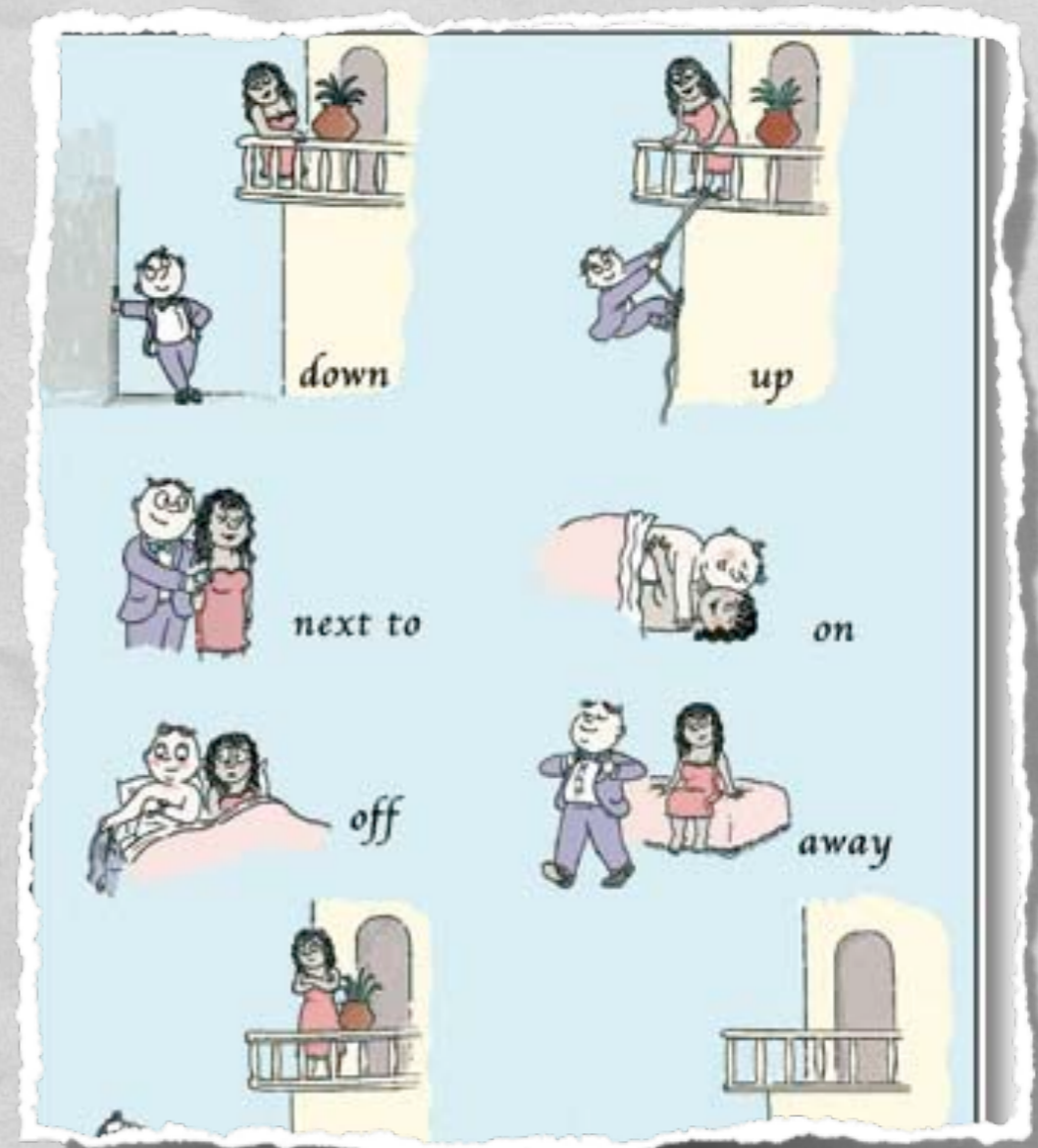


What is your *favorite* version  
of the Bible?

Does it matter?

# Prepositions: “in” vs. “of”

- In almost any English translation, you will find several passages in which Paul ostensibly speaks of “faith *in* Christ / Jesus / God’s Son”).
- However, many scholars increasingly maintain that in the seven undisputed letters of Paul, every instance in which the phrase “faith *in* Christ” (or its variants) appears would be better translated “faithfulness *of* Christ.”
- The phrase occurs with minor variations seven times in the undisputed letters -- Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16 (twice), 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9.



# Genitive Construction

- In Greek, there is no preposition between the nouns “faith” and “Christ.” The two nouns form a *genitive* construction.
- Greek adds *prefixes* and *suffixes* to convey parts of speech — as does German and Latin. (English often relies on word order.)
- Nominative = subject
- Accusative = direct object
- Dative = indirect object
- Genitive = possessive



- Most common way to render a Greek noun in the genitive case into English is with the *preposition* “of.” (The *-ou* suffix indicates the genitive case.)
- In Romans 3:21, the phrase *dikaiosune theou* is “righteousness of God.” (*Theos* would be nominative.)
- *Pistis Iesou Christou* could be either “faith of Jesus Christ” or “Jesus Christ’s faithfulness.
- But the phrase is consistently rendered “faith *in* Jesus Christ” in English translations: NRSV, NIV, NASV, CEV, NAB, and ESV.



# TRADITION

JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY  
DOESN'T MEAN IT'S NOT INCREDIBLY STUPID.

Why?

- Reformation debates - deeply influenced the tradition of English translation, especially Martin Luther's German translation (1534).
  - Luther translated the phrase as an "objective genitive," removing the ambiguity: *pistis iesou christou* = *den Glauben an Jesus Christus* = faith in Christ.
  - Interestingly, William Tyndale's English translation (1526) chose "fayth of Christ."
- Also, virtually all translators of the New Testament have been *Christians*, and over time "faith in Christ" became the essence of Christian faith itself for many.

# FURTHER AMBIGUITY OF “FAITH OF CHRIST”

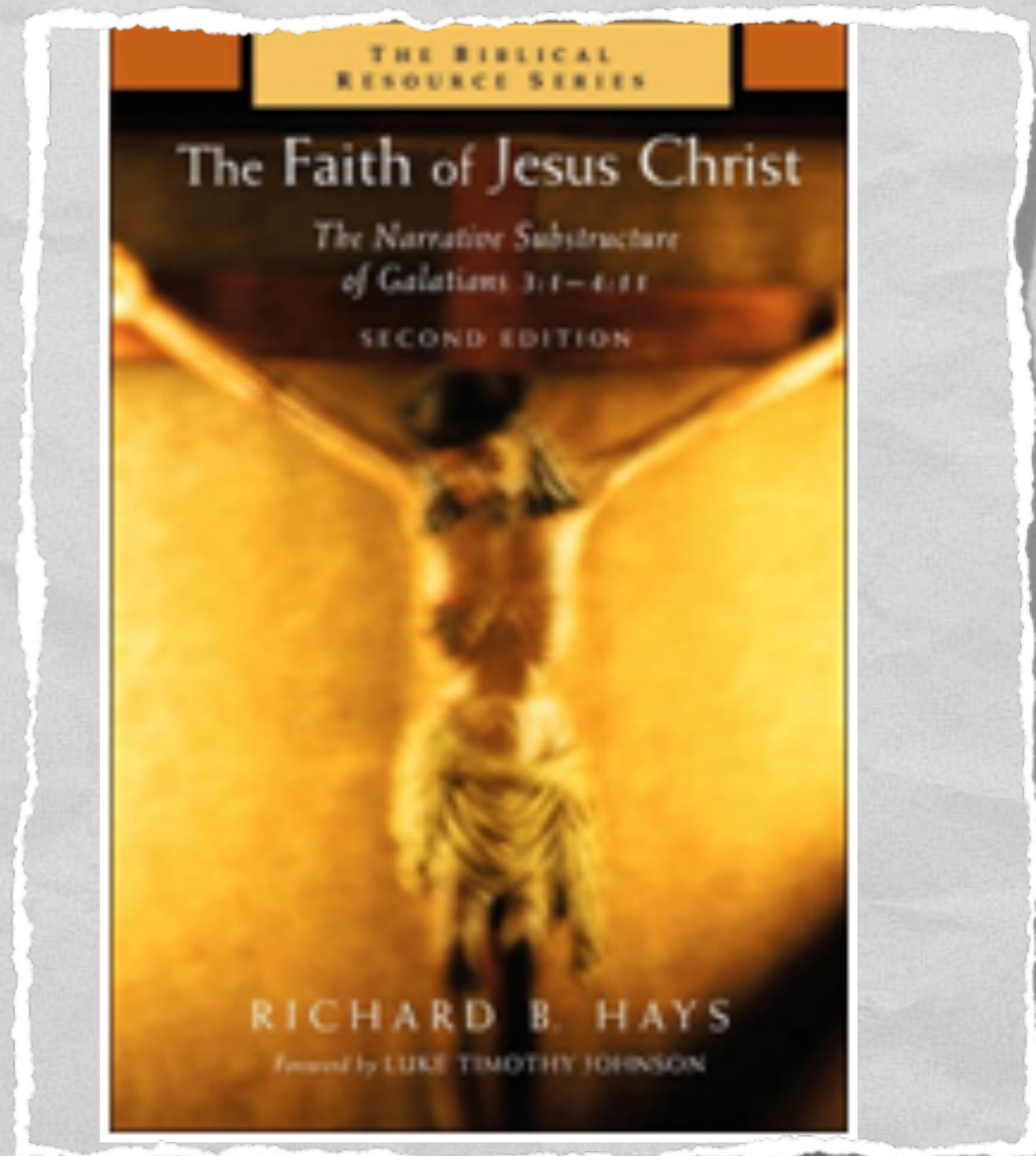
- Objective genitive
  - Christ is the object of “faith”
  - Faith in Christ
  - faith directed by a subject toward Christ the object.
- Subjective genitive
  - Christ is the subject of “faith”
  - faithfulness of Christ
  - the faith is Christ’s
  - Christ’s faith





Luke Timothy Johnson credits Richard Hays' 2002 book as shifting the debate in favor of the *subjective genitive* reading for a majority of New Testament scholars all along the theological spectrum:

- Christ is the subject of “faith”
- faithfulness of Christ
- the faith is Christ’s
- Christ’s faith
- The “faithfulness of Christ”



# Case Study

## Romans 3:21-22

- NRSV: “But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”
- Pamela Eisenbaum: “Now, however, apart from the Torah, the righteousness of God has been made manifest to which the same Torah and the prophets gave witness; [namely,] the righteousness of God [which has come] through the **faithfulness of Jesus Christ** for all those who are faithful.”
  - Paul is not asserting a cause-and-effect relationship between the faith of human beings and God’s righteousness.
  - Instead, Jesus is the manifestation of God’s righteousness.