



Charismatic Misreadings Mark 11:22 Faith of God?



Mikael Stenhammar, BA, MA, MTh, PhD, is a Swedish pastor, missionary, and theologian. He runs the liberating.faith project to help people into genuine faith in God.

Let's talk about the very important questions: does God have faith? And did Jesus really mean to say so in Mark 11:22? Should his words be understood as “have faith in God” or as the Faith and Prosperity Gospel teaches, “have faith of God” or “the God-kind of faith”? Your reply to these questions greatly effects your Christian life, so they are well-worth thinking through. Why don't you get a cup of something good and let's start.

**So Jesus answered and said to them,
'Have faith **in** God.'**

Mark 11:22 New King James Version

If you come from a background in the Faith and Prosperity Gospel—as I do—you have surely encountered this verse many times and heard that every believer has the measure of “God's faith”, or “the God-kind of faith”. This is an elementary belief in the movement. So much so that I've heard it being preached on Sunday morning services, been taught it in Bible school, read it in books, and so on. Jesus' words are used to support the claim that believers have the right and privilege of operating in the same faith that God has. This belief is so often spoken of or hinted at that it has become a taken-for-granted truth. I dare say that Mark 11:22 might even be one of the absolute most—if not the most—significant verses for the whole movement because it directly affects all other beliefs about God. A number of central beliefs and practices in the Faith and Prosperity Gospel stand or fall with their interpretation of Jesus' words.

Be a Truth-Seeker

If you are a committed Faith and Prosperity Gospel believer, I know that it can be very difficult to listen to counterarguments to what you have been taught. I struggled a lot with thinking that every argument that challenged my established beliefs was the devil trying to deconstruct my faith. But you don't have to worry about that. God's truth can stand a closer look. So, if what the Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachers say is right, then it will hold up under scrutiny. But if what they say doesn't hold water, then you should be thankful the quicker you come to learn about better interpretations. All I ask is that you are a truth-seeker and are willing to evaluate your beliefs in light of Scripture. Instead of just copying what someone says Jesus meant, we need to do like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 and search the Scriptures to test what interpretation is most valid. That is what we will do now.



What You Will Learn

I begin by giving some background to the Faith and Prosperity Gospel's interpretation of Mark 11:22 and then I look closer at its meaning in light of the Bible's message (canonical perspective), the context of the verse, and the grammatical construction. In the last point we need to get a bit technical and look at some of the original Greek, but don't worry if that sound's overwhelming—I will guide you step by step and I'm sure you will find it interesting and rewarding.

Why Listen to Me?

You might ask who am I to guide this investigation? It is a valid question. I am often hesitant to speak about personal accomplishments as they sound like bragging but in some situations, it is important to show your credentials. If you enter a hospital with an acute medical problem you want to talk with someone who has the title "doctor" and not "janitor" (I don't mean to down janitors because the doctor's work would not be possible without a good janitor keeping the hospital clean). Apart from my doctoral degree in theology I have two master's degrees in the New Testament and have worked with classical and New Testament Greek. I spent one full year researching and writing a thesis on how to translate a biblical phrase consisting of five Greek words alone. I share this to say that I am trained in wrestling with problems of interpretation and translation in the New Testament. I've spent well more than a decade of full-time studies and research so that I would be able to help believers better interpret God's Word and so live the life of faith that God calls us to live. Now I hope you can confidently accept my invitation to guide you through Mark 11:22.

The Setting of Jesus' Words

The larger context of Jesus' words in Mark 11:22 is that Jesus had cursed the fig tree and Peter comes to Jesus in surprise after seeing it dead. Let's read the larger context

(as a side note, I will mainly quote from the New King James version as it is a common translation used in the Faith and Prosperity Gospel):

So Jesus answered and said to them, "**Have faith in God.** ²³For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:22–24, NKJV, emphasis added).

The phrase translated here as "have faith in God" is the Greek *exete pistin theou*. It literally can be translated as "have faith in God" or "have faith of God". I will get back to the details of Greek later in the discussion. Here it is enough to recognize the Greek phrase and to know that the Greek grammar opens for the dual possibility of interpretation.

If what the Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachers say is right, then it will hold up under scrutiny.

Faith of God Translations

The absolute majority of translations (I'd say roughly 99% of them) translate Jesus' words as "Have faith in God" (or similar). Yet there are some versions that go contrary to this dominant view. The Wycliffe Bible from the 14th century has it "Have ye the faith of God". The Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims translation (from the Latin vulgate) dating back to the 16th century puts Jesus' words as "Have the faith of God". Young's Literal Translation published in 1862 does something similar: "Have faith of God". The Worrell New Testament from 1904 says "Have the faith of God".¹ The Bible in Basic English from 1941 has "Have God's faith". The much more recent Passion Translation paraphrases Jesus' words to say: "Let the faith of God be in you!"²

Apart from direct translations, the King James Version from 1611 renders the verse as the majority ("Have faith in God") but adds the footnote "Have the faith of God". This footnote was among other things what influenced the early Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachers to opt for this reading.³



Arguments for Faith in God

A very strong case, however, can be made that Jesus meant to say “have faith in God”. This is for three main reasons, all starting with the letter c (which makes it easy to remember): (1) canon, (2) context, and (3) construction. By canon, I mean the whole biblical message. By context, I mean the immediate literary setting of Jesus’ words. By construction, I mean the grammatical composition of the phrase. Let’s unpack each and see where they lead us.

1. Canon

My first argument is to consider the canon. “Canon” is another term for the sixty-six books of the Bible that Protestant Christians consider inspired and authoritative

Gospels, make sure to first search out if there is a parallel text in the other Gospels and then study those. Most often, parallel texts shed light and help to solve problems, and this is also true of Mark 11:22. The parallel in Matthew 21:21–22 reads like this:

So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, **if you have faith and do not doubt**, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. ²²And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matthew 21:21–22 NKJV, emphasis added).

In Matthew, we learn that Jesus simply speaks about having faith. There is no hint whatsoever that this would be any qualitatively different faith than what he has already spoken about, which is faith in God.

The Faith and Prosperity Gospel often uses its own

“If Jesus wanted to bring out the revolutionary idea that God has faith, it is very strange that such a point is totally missed in the parallel text in Matthew’s gospel”

for Christian belief and practice. The argument coming from the whole Bible—the canon—is that Christian faith is always faith in God.⁴ In other words, God is always the object of faith. You can say it this way, for faith to be Christian faith, it has to be faith in God. There is nowhere—I repeat, nowhere!—in the Bible, apart from the possibility of Mark 11:22, which says that God has faith (but keep on reading to the end, as I say more about this later).⁵

The Parallel Text

A helpful and well-established principle of interpreting challenging Bible passages is to let other easier-to-interpret texts shed light on the hard and difficult ones. When applying this let-Scripture-interpret-Scripture-principle it will, first of all, lead us to the parallel text in Matthew 21. Any time you encounter a difficult verse in the

principle of interpretation, which is that any teaching needs to be established by the testimony of two or three other verses (see 2 Cor. 13:1)—not a bad principle to follow, by the way (as long as the verses you use are interpreted rightly). So, when applying this principle, we see rather quickly that an interpretation of Jesus’ words *exete pistin theou* in Mark 11:22 as indicating that God has faith fails as a possible interpretation since there are no other verses that support this interpretation. (And for the record, Hebrews 11:3 does not speak about God creating the world by faith. You can check my exposition of this too). When we keep this train of thought—if Jesus wanted to bring out the revolutionary idea that God has faith (which would be the first time in the whole Bible)—it is very strange indeed that such a point is totally missed in the parallel text in Matthew’s gospel.

Notice that the way Matthew phrases Jesus’ words is simply “have faith” (Gk. *exete pistin*). The possibility of it being any other faith than the disciples’ (i.e., God’s faith)



is out of the question in Matthew 21:21. So, if Jesus had made this earth-shattering claim that God has faith—which challenged the total conception of how faith is described in the Old Testament and would be a totally new insight for his Jewish disciples—surely Matthew would include that in his retelling of the story! That he didn't do so shows the improbability of Mark 11:22 saying anything other than having faith in God. Putting this point in other terms: since the Holy Spirit is the Author with capital A of the Bible, why did the Holy Spirit not inspire Matthew to bring out this point, so at least there would be one more text to support the Faith and Prosperity Gospel reading of Mark 11:22? I think you see on what shallow biblical grounds the interpretation that God has faith is resting on—definitely not a solid foundation for doctrine and practice.

Faith in God Translations

Bible translations have to factor in the message of the Bible when translating singular verses and phrases. So a brief survey of English translations is helpful here to get a bearing on what translators do with Mark 11:22. Let me just state the obvious: those who serve on respected Bible translations committees have to be experts in the biblical languages. So how they translate a verse is a good pointer to its meaning. Even though a handful translations made the choice of “faith of God” (or similar) that we looked at above, we must not miss the very important fact that “faith in God” is the unanimous translation of English translations, old and new.⁶ Of all the most sold (and probably most-used) English translations in the USA 2021, every translation chooses “faith in God”.⁷ Look at this:

New International Version (NIV): “Have faith in God”
King James Version (KJV): “Have faith in God”
New Living Translation (NLT): “Have faith in God”
English Standard Version (ESV): “Have faith in God”
New King James Version (NKJV): “Have faith in God”
Christian Standard Bible (CSB): “Have faith in God”
New International Reader's Version (NIrV): “Have faith in God”
New American Standard Bible (NASB): “Have faith in God”⁸

This list could be made much, much longer making the voices supporting the “faith in God” interpretation even more powerful. Yet it should be said that the majority vote is not always right (the majority in Jerusalem shouted “Hosanna” five days before they shouted “crucify”). But at the same time, we must respect the work of the Spirit in Bible translations. I believe the Spirit leads a group to discern the truth—as in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:28. If this revolutionary insight that God has faith is lost to each and every of the most-used Bible versions today, then doesn't that say that God is doing quite a poor job in watching over His word?

Is 50 Years Enough?

If you want to support the faith of God reading, you could of course argue that it is a new insight and it would take time to sink in. But the idea of Mark 11:22 meaning God's faith has been in circulation for well over 50 years now, so there has been plenty of time. A more probable reason for “God's faith” not being picked up in any major translation is that there isn't any strong basis at all for such a rendering.

A very strong case can be made that Jesus meant to say ‘have faith in God’

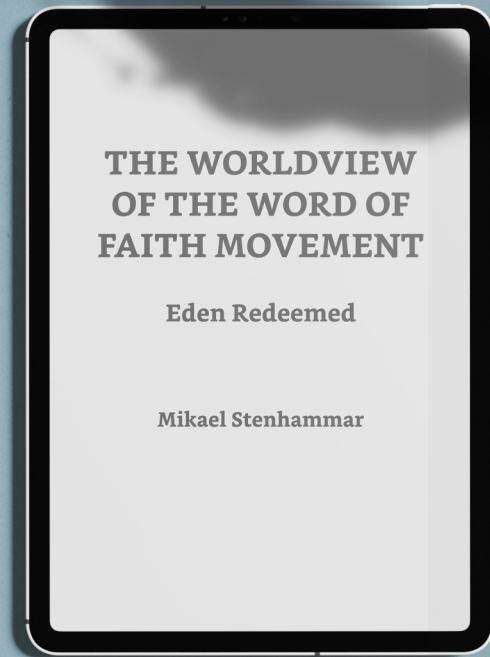
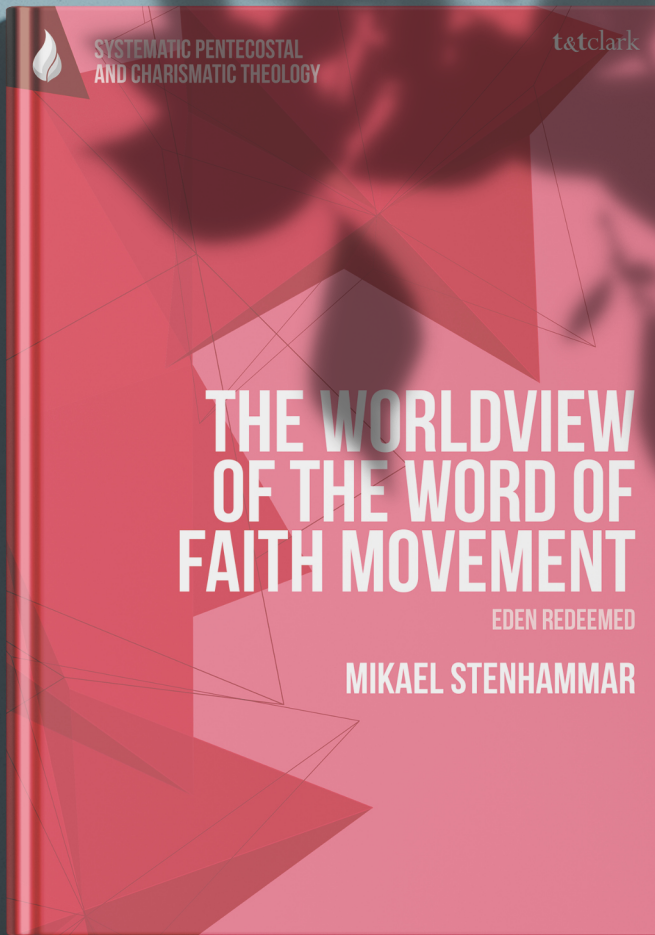
2. Context

Let us consider the immediate context of Jesus' words in Mark 11. This reveals two main insights that help us think more clearly about the meaning of *exete pistin theou*.

The Importance of Context

A quick general note on context will help us before we continue. The literary context is made up of the surrounding text, what preceded Jesus' words, and what came directly after. The context must always decide the meaning of a phrase or a word. A word or phrase can have a variety of meanings on its own in isolation, but it is the context in which it is used that shows which exact meaning the author meant. When we speak, we don't use words with all their possible meanings at the same time. When I say, for example, that “I have an interest in the Bible,” I don't even think that the meaning of the word “interest” can also mean the fee you have to pay on a bank





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loan. The same with grammatical constructions. Just because there is a possibility of translating “faith of God” we need to let the context show how probable that option really is. The context brings out two key points that make this rendering improbable. Let’s turn to them now.

Faith vs. Doubt

The first point from the context centers on doubt. Because in a closer study of Mark 11 we see that Jesus’ main point is to teach faith as the opposite to doubt—that the disciples are to exercise faith over doubt. In verse 23 he says, “and does not doubt in his heart, but believes”. In other words, Jesus’ message is: “have faith and don’t doubt”. We remember that the parallel text in Matthew emphasized the exact same point. It says: “if you have faith and do not doubt” (Matt. 21:21). Jesus clearly meant to put doubt as the opposite of faith.

How does this help us sort out the Faith and Prosperity Gospel’s interpretation? Well, since Jesus puts doubt as the opposite to the faith encouraged in verse 22, what he meant by *exete pistin theou* cannot possibly be God’s faith. Why? Because it just doesn’t make any sense that the faith God has (if He had any) would need to be sustained in the face of doubt. Think about it. The image of God that would come from that is of a God who has to wrestle with the possibility of doubt and failure. It would mean that God is imperfect and that the future has the possibility of God being overcome by doubt. That is going way beyond (or below, rather) the biblical descriptions of God! Also, if God would doubt, what kind of unbelief would it be? Some kind of self-doubt? Such a portrait of God doesn’t fit the God of the Bible—“who cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). And it opens a can of theological worms.

Faith Expressed through Petitionary Prayer

The second point we learn by considering the immediate literary context of Mark 11:22 is that the faith Jesus speaks of is one that is expressed through petitionary prayer.⁹ Listen to verse 24: “whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have

them”. It is clear from this (and verse 25 too) that the faith Jesus speaks of in verse 22 is one that expects God to do something in answer to faith and prayer. It is a faith that needs to ask, that is, to turn in a petition to a higher power (i.e., God).

How does this insight help us with the Faith and Prosperity Gospel interpretation? Prayer is a very important point to consider for a proper understanding of Jesus’ message. Since Jesus says that the faith we are supposed to have is one that looks to God to work out the answer, it shows the impossibility of interpreting Mark 11:22 to speak about a faith that God also has. Because how could God look to a power greater than Himself to accomplish His desire? If that was so, God would not be the greatest power beyond whom nothing greater can be conceived. God would be dependent on this greater power, to which faith must turn

to. If Jesus meant to say that we should have the God-kind of faith, where then does God turn to ask in faith? What power is greater than His own? A God that needs to pray is not a true God. I think you can see how hard it gets to support the reading of Mark 11:22 as saying “have faith of God”.

Christian faith is always faith in God

3. Construction

The two arguments above based on the canon and the context should be enough to settle the case for a “faith in God” interpretation of Jesus’ words. But there is an even stronger argument based on the grammatical construction and to get to that we need to dig into some more technical information. Stay with me and we will walk it through step by step. It will be worth your efforts, promise.

The Gospel of Mark, like the rest of the New Testament, was written in Greek. The original text of Jesus’ words in Mark 11:22 reads (like I noted above): *exete pistin theou*. This is what it looks like with the English translation.

<i>exete</i>	<i>pistin</i>	<i>theou</i>
have	faith	God (genitive)

In Greek, nouns have different cases or functions in the sentence, indicated by their endings. *Theou* is in the genitive case (of *theos*). Genitive serves various functions in Greek. The most-used is the so-called possessive genitive which we are very familiar with from its common usage in English. The phrase “the kingdom of God” (*basileia tou theou*), for example, is in genitive to show that it is God’s kingdom—the kingdom belonging to God.



<i>basileia</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>theou</i>
kingdom	the	God (genitive)

Love of God

Possessive genitive is such a straightforward usage of the genitive case that we can move on to the subjective and objective usages. The phrase “love of God” (*agape tou theou*) helps to make sense of these two usages.

<i>agape</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>theou</i>
love	the	God (genitive)

It can either mean the love that is from God, where God is the subject of love—hence a subjective genitive. This is the usage in 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and **the love of God** [*agape tou theou*], and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (NKJV, emphasis added). This verse basically says: grace from Jesus, love from God, fellowship from the Spirit.

But the exact same phrase—“love of God” (*agape tou theou*)—can also be an objective genitive, where God is the object of love: love for God. In 1 John 5:3a that is the case: “For this is **the love of God** [*agape tou theou*], that we keep His commandments” (NKJV, emphasis added). In other words, the love we have for God is expressed in obedience. That is why other translations, such as the NIV, rephrase the English to capture the objective genitive: “In fact, this is **love for God**: to keep his commands” (emphasis added).

Objective or Subjective Genitive?

This quick survey of how genitive can work in Greek helps us better understand the key grammatical problem in Mark 11:22, which can be stated like this: Is the construction *exete pistin theou* to be understood as an objective genitive where God is the object or goal of faith (faith in or towards God) or as a subjective genitive where God is the source (faith of or from God)? Here are some points why objective genitive is the most probable. It is worth keeping in mind that the phrase we are analyzing is unique in the

New Testament, hence we need to do some extra work to figure it out.

2 Thessalonians 2:13b

When faith (*pistis*) is followed by a noun in the genitive in the Bible it is best understood as an objective genitive.¹⁰ Here are two examples. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13b it says this: “because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and **belief in the truth** (*pistei aletheias*)” (NKJV, emphasis added).

<i>pistei</i>	<i>aletheias</i>
faith	truth (genitive)

This must be an objective genitive (as the NKJV has translated it). It wouldn’t make any sense to interpret it as a subjective genitive, making it say that truth had faith—“faith of truth” or “truth’s faith” or “the truth-kind of faith”.

Ἔχετε
πίστιν
θεοῦ

Philippians 1:27b

The same impossibility of a subjective genitive goes for Philippians 1:27b: “with one mind striving together for **the faith of the gospel** [*pistei tou euangelou*]” (NKJV, emphasis added).

<i>pistei</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>euangelou</i>
faith	the	gospel (genitive)

Subjective genitive would make this to say the gospel’s faith, that the gospel has faith. How could a nonmaterial entity have faith? That doesn’t make any sense. Rather, objective genitive—faith in the gospel—is the only reasonable interpretation. These two examples show how similar grammatical constructions to Mark 11:22 that use faith (*pistis*) followed by a noun in the genitive are best translated as objective genitives. Yet as is always the case with translations, no option can be fully proven as we deal in degrees of probability rather than in absolutes. There are similar constructions where a subjective reading is better and I return to those later.



Prayer of God or Prayer to God?

Let's look at a construction where God [*theou*] is in the genitive and if that affects the meaning at all and if this would change how we interpret Mark 11:22. What I want to check is if when God (*theos*) is used, does it make a subjective genitive more plausible? In Luke 6:12 we have such an example: "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in **prayer to God** [*proseuxe tou theou*]" (NKJV, emphasis mine). Even though the translators put it as an objective genitive, in Greek it is an equally open question as in Mark 11:22. This is how it looks:

<i>proseuxe</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>theou</i>
prayer	the	God (genitive)

Should we understand the genitive case of God here to be objective—prayer to God—or subjective—prayer of God, or God's prayer? The Greek grammar leaves it open for us to settle. But it is not a hard choice as it surely means objective: prayer to God. The subjective option of prayer of God, or God's prayer, doesn't fit the context at all, because Jesus is doing the prayer. Nor does the image of God in the Bible fit the idea that God prays. Even though you could grammatically say "the God-kind of prayer" it just doesn't fit the context nor how God is portrayed in the Bible. So, a similar construction to Mark 11:22 with God in the genitive is best understood as an objective genitive. Again, this on its own does not settle the case, but it makes another example that strengthens the case for a "faith in God" rendering of Mark 11:22.

Fear of God or God's Fear?

Perhaps one of the better arguments that will help to settle what Mark 11:22 means for English speakers without troubling ourselves with too many Greek and grammatical technicalities is the biblical phrase "fear of God". We use this phrase frequently and the meaning is obvious to all without even thinking of it. Let us ask if it is an objective or subjective genitive construction? In other words, should it be objective—as in fear for God—or subjective—as in

God's fear or the fear that God has? The answer is so evident that the question sounds almost too simplistic even to ask. But that is exactly the strength of this point. We use the phrase "fear of God" constantly knowing that it is an objective genitive phrase in English, speaking of the fear (the awe, respect, reverence) we are to show toward God. In English, we can keep saying "fear of God" because it is obvious from our understanding of God as He has revealed Himself that God doesn't have fear—God is love and perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:8, 18). A subjective understanding of the genitive God is out of the question. Though the grammar would allow for such an interpretation, the revelation of God through Scripture makes such an option a non-option.

I believe this is exactly why the historical translations we looked at above put "faith of God", because in their view, thinking it is a subjective genitive was out of consideration—as far-fetched as to say "God's fear". The simple reason that they left it at "Have faith of God" instead of rephrasing it (as in Luke 6:12) shows that they thought of it as an obvious objective genitive.

We must respect the work of the Spirit in Bible translations

Romans 3:18

If we want to think about this point using some Greek, Romans 3:18 is a great example: "There is no **fear of God** [*phobos theou*] before their eyes" (NKJV, emphasis added). This is how this phrase looks like:

<i>phobos</i>	<i>theou</i>
fear	God (genitive)

This phrase could—as Mark 11:22—mean both "fear for God" (objective) or "God's fear" (subjective). But like I just said, it is clearly objective. Yet if you push for Mark 11:22 to mean "the God-kind of faith", then by the same argument you would make Romans 3:18 say "the God-kind of fear". Yet both faith and fear are aspects of our human experience—God is beyond both! Neither phrase is meant as a subjective genitive.



New Attempts to Save the God-Kind of Faith

A word must be said about how some second-generation Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachers have picked up on the improbability of a subjective interpretation of Mark 11:22 and conceded to the faith in God rendering. But in doing so they still want to hold fast to the underlying belief of the God-kind of faith and therefore turn to other verses to support that belief. One particular idea is that believers have Jesus' kind of faith (interpreting subjective genitives in verses such as Galatians 2:20). I speak to these texts in other studies, but just to be clear—spoiler alert!—even in those verses where a subjective rendering is quite possible, the idea of faith being a force, a power, a supernatural entity, something in and of itself that God has and shares with Jesus and us, is an idea totally foreign to the biblical worldview. The only way you will find it in the Bible is if it's already a part of the filter through which you read the biblical texts. I don't mean that in a condescending way, only that mature Bible interpretation requires that we become aware of the point of view we have as we approach God's Word. There is no point of view from nowhere and all of us approach the Bible with some sort of glasses on. Maturity comes when we can identify our filters and critically examine them to see if they distort the Bible's message or not.

God's Faithfulness: A Baby in the Bathwater?

So, "faith in God" (objective genitive) is with very little doubt the best way to understand Jesus' exhortation *exete pistin theou* in Mark 11:22. But isn't there any takeaway from how they have interpreted the verse? Isn't there at least a little baby to be saved from going out with the bathwater? I want to think that there can at least be some kernel of truth even among a lot of confusion. Here I can point to God's faithfulness and the possibility of a totally different interpretation than the two we have discussed. The Greek word *pistin* translated "faith" in Mark 11:22 also carries the meaning of "faithfulness" (as it most probably does in Galatians 5:22, for example). This leads to another option, namely to see Jesus' words as bringing the disciples' attention to God's faithfulness—on which all Christian faith is based.

Romans 3:3

There is a similar Greek construction in Romans 3:3 that might support this interpretation: "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make **the faithfulness of God** [*pistin tou theou*] without effect?" (Romans 3:3 NKJV, emphasis mine). This is what it looks like:

<i>pistin</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>theou</i>
faith	the	God (genitive)

Again, the word *pistin* can mean both "faith" and "faithfulness". Every translation I surveyed chose "faithfulness" here. And that is because the context demands it since Paul is contrasting human faithlessness with God's faithfulness. In light of Romans 3:3, this could make us understand Jesus' words in Mark 11:22 to be a subjective genitive construction, which would say something like: "have God's faithfulness" or "have the God-kind of faithfulness". That God's people should mirror God's faithfulness is a thoroughly biblical argument that runs through all of the Bible. As such it picks up an important scriptural theme.

Let's think about it for a second. If Jesus speaks of God's faithfulness in Mark 11:22, then he could be speaking of how his disciples are to display the faithfulness shown within the Trinity, that is, the faithfulness shown between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their relationship is surely one of complete faithfulness and trust. This is a great theological truth. Yet that is, of course, not what the Faith and Prosperity Gospel means, but in going down this route there is a way for the Faith and Prosperity Gospel to back down from their initial claim while still showing that their subjective genitive take on Mark 11:22 can open up for some fresh perspectives. Even though there are some great insights to be gained by reading Jesus' words as speaking of God's faithfulness, the text does not really seem to support seeing *pistin* as faithfulness in Mark 11:22. As we have seen, Jesus' focus is on contrasting faith and doubt in the life of his followers and not on the inner life of the Trinity.

My reason for bringing up God's faithfulness here is to show that interpreting the Bible is often a complex evaluation of various options and that at the end of the day you seldom can prove any interpretation to be 100% correct. Rather than measuring interpretation on an absolute scale with only two possibilities of truth or error, we need to be aware of nuances of truth and that some new readings might in the end show to be less plausible but they might still have unlocked some new and vital



insights along the way. If the Faith and Prosperity Gospel wants to hold fast to their rendering “faith of God”, there is the biblical option of understanding it as “faithfulness of God”. That way they are still within the parameters of the biblical story and within Jesus’ overall teachings (though most probably not what he meant to communicate in Mark 11:22). However, if the Faith and Prosperity Gospel contends for the interpretation of God having faith, it is a step outside of the biblical worldview, imposing a foreign thought on Jesus’ words, and, as such, generates several other problems.

Summary

So, in light of all of the above, does God have faith, according to Jesus’ words in Mark 11:22? When you consider the full message of the Bible (canon), the literary setting of Jesus’ words (context), and how the Greek phrase works (construction), there is absolutely no convincing argument in support of the Faith and Prosperity Gospel interpretation. Since Mark 11:22 is the only verse in the Bible that possibly says that God has faith and in light of all the strong arguments for the objective interpretation of “faith in God”, those who choose to hold fast to the subjective interpretation of “faith of God” do so due to other reasons than biblical commitments (whether knowingly or unknowingly). Once we have reached this stage, that those who chose the Faith and Prosperity Gospel can admit they do so because of subjective reasons of taste—they like it better and it fits their worldview better—then we have really come a long way and can enter fruitful conversations about the filters we use (knowingly or unknowingly) to interpret the Bible. But as long as the Faith and Prosperity Gospel says that Mark 11:22 means “faith of God” based on objective reasons found in the biblical texts that are there for all to see, it shows that they have yet to consider the force of the opposing arguments. There is just no Scriptural basis—the Faith and Prosperity Gospel interpretation of Mark 11:22 rests on sand. The problem with that is significant because it is one of the strongest verses in the Bible that encourages us to put our faith in God.

The Faith and Prosperity Gospel interpretation directs our attention away from God and to us. That makes me wonder who benefits from such an interpretation in the long run? The devil is in the details, as the saying goes and I think the devil entered the genitive construction of Mark 11:22 and through that led to a number of other problems. (I don’t mean that the Faith and Prosperity

Gospel is inspired by the devil, but that they fell for one of the devil’s tricks—he is a master Scripture-twister). Let’s expel the devil out of Mark 11:22 and follow Jesus’ exhortation to have faith in God! That’s obviously what the devil is so afraid of.

Notes

1. Due to S. A. Worrell’s part of early Pentecostalism, his influence on the Faith and Prosperity Gospel understanding might be significant. His comment on Mark 11:22 is important: “Have the faith of God; translators generally render this, ‘Have faith in God;’ but, if this had been the thought, it would have been easy to have expressed it in the Greek. Faith originates with God; and those who have real faith have His faith; the same perhaps as ‘the faith which is of the Son of God’ (Gal. 2:20). This mountain: nothing short of the faith of God can remove mountains; but His faith, operating through His obedient children, can accomplish this, (Acts 3:6; 9:34)” Worrell, A. S. *The Worrell New Testament* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, [1904] 1980). Notice that Worrell takes a step beyond the text when he simply asserts, “faith originates with God”—an assertion that he has no backing for either in the Bible nor in Christian theology.

2. We should probably be careful to list the Passion Translation here together with the others as it is more a paraphrase and there are some underlying problems with this version’s usage of the Aramaic language as a basis for translation (when the New Testament was written in Greek).

3. In the 1930s the American Baptist scholar A. T. Robertson made a note of the possibility of phrasing Mark 11:22 as “the God kind of faith”. Since his work was influential, it is possible that his comment somehow trickled down to the early Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachers (though, it must be mentioned, Robertson, in context, didn’t say that God had faith but rather that “faith in God” was the intended meaning). See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 500.

4. For more, see my teachings on “What Faith Is”.

5. I know that the Faith and Prosperity Gospel preachers read Hebrews 11:3 as saying that God created the world by faith. You can listen to my teachings on that, but that is not even an option in the original Greek for such an interpretation. The possibility of that is even less than in Mark 11:22.

6. The same goes for scholarly commentaries on the Gospel of Mark.

7. <https://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/translations.php?id=BO21>, accessed April 14, 2022.

8. The Message was last on the list. It is a paraphrase which chooses, according to its style, to rephrase the text considerably: “Embrace this God-life. Really embrace it”.

9. The Faith and Prosperity Gospel says that Mark 11:23 teaches positive confession. But this text is best interpreted as a form of prayer or at least a Spirit-inspired command originating in God. Either way, it is not a form of expression that fits the image of God in the Bible. For this, read my study of this verse.

10. These examples are certainly not identical to Mark 11:22 as it is a unique construction in the Bible. But these are meant to illustrate how faith (though in the dative case) takes an objective genitive rather than subjective.

