

FAITH

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Introduction

The *only* Greek word translated as faith in the New Testament is **pistis**. It appears in 244 verses and has also been translated as assurance, belief and fidelity. The fundamental idea of faith in scripture is that of steadfastness, and faithfulness in *action*. There are many variations of pistis, such as **pistos** which is translated as faithful(y), believe(r)(ing), true and sure; **oligopistos** which means one who has a small measure of trust and is translated "of little faith." The usage of oligopistos is limited (five scriptures) and was used only by Christ; and **pisteo**, the Greek word for belief which appears in 248 scriptures. See the Appendix for a listing of all the Scriptures translated as faith. The Greek language intimately connects faith and belief as evidenced by the same Greek root "pist." This intimate connection in meaning is true in theology and scriptures as well. Separating the two is indeed a difficult task. Both words, as used in the New Testament, appear in nearly 500 scriptures and both contain elements of *confidence* and *conviction*.

One of the differences between faith and belief has to do with its origin. For example, do we believe because we have faith, or do we have faith because we believe? The bible strongly and clearly suggests the latter. We have faith because we believe. Faith has at its core the ability to act upon our convictions and belief. Faith is our ability to commit and put into action that which we believe. This is what the Apostle James meant when he said faith without works is dead. Without action, faith does not exist, only belief is present. Belief is intellectual, faith is practical or that which empowers us with the ability to put into practice our beliefs.

Can our beliefs be attained through the human process of observation, examination and reason? In a word, yes! Let's contrast this with faith. Can faith be attained through the human process of observation, examination and reason? No, it cannot for faith is a gift from God. It appears from Scripture that the gift of faith is given only to believers. (Eph. 2:8, Rom. 1:11-12, 12:6, 1Cor. 13:2, Jn. 4:10).

The bible study on Belief in the General Theology section of Topical Studies. The study on belief explores the similarities and differences between the two. An extensive study on faith and belief is too far-reaching a subject and well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the subject of faith and belief will be examined to the degree that it will stimulate you to study scriptures on the subject and to examine your own faith and beliefs.

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Faith, when viewed philosophically, must be regarded as the foundational basis of all knowledge whether that knowledge be religious or secular. For example, do we believe first so that we may know or do we know first so that we may believe? The answer - to a large degree - depends upon the object of our faith. Truths perceived intuitively demand faith in intuition. Truths arrived at by logic or reasoning implies faith in the workings of the human mind. Knowledge obtained through the five senses has an underlying faith in the senses. This is why it is not wise to draw too sharp a distinction between matters of faith and matters of knowledge because all matters of knowledge depend upon some measure of faith. The distinction between faith and knowledge recognizes the different objects to which our convictions relate and the different methods used to arrive at these convictions.

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Convictions arrived at through knowledge may be equally as strong as convictions accepted and acted upon by faith. An example of this is the impassioned debates concerning creationism and evolution.

Faith, as used in New Testament scriptures represent four principal ideas, all of which involve a form of action or implementation.

1. Personal Confidence and Trust in God
2. Doctrine or Creed to govern behaviors
3. Evidence or Fruit of the believer's trust in God, by acting upon that trust
4. Designation for Christ as the object and source for faith

As a doctrine of the essential body of revealed truth, faith is the belief and trust in the higher power of God and has two distinct yet inseparable elements: intellect and ethics.

INTELLECT.

The intellectual component of faith is defined as the conviction to act upon the reality of the truths and facts which God has revealed. Such convictions rest solely upon the testimony of God as revealed in scriptures. God chose to reveal them to us because they are of utmost importance in relation to human life and salvation. These revealed truths and facts are to a large extent beyond the reach of the ordinary human process of acquiring knowledge, that is, through observation, examination and reason. The relationship between reason and faith is one of "subordination" not conflict. Many revealed truths are beyond reason because the reasoning process could not discover the divine truths of God. The reality that most divine truths cannot be discovered through reasoning does not mean that revelation is in opposition to reasoning. It only means revelation is superior to reasoning. In fact, it is through our salvation experience we find that reason is subordinated to revelation and is by no means in opposition to faith.

Reason, however, has its justly recognized place and function in examining and weighing the evidences of revelation. The duty of reason is to interpret or determine the force or the terms in which that revelation is given. Once the reality and meaning of revelation has been reached through reason, reason has completed its work. Now faith takes over and determines the acceptance and implications of revelation in action, whatever that may be. However, it is the ensuing ethical elements (action) of faith which often do not directly appeal to reason. Many believers lack the ability or opportunity to investigate the rational evidences of Christianity. The term blind faith is often used whenever faith stimulates action yet reason indicates inaction. Faith appears as blind faith only to those who lack it. Faith is not blind ... it is the sure foundation of our convictions that empower the believer to do. It is faith alone that allows a believer to act upon the sacrifice of Jesus by accepting Him as personal Lord and Savior.

Those who accept God's revealed knowledge must do so upon the trustworthiness of the divine testimony. This divine testimony is contained in the holy scriptures. However, no matter how indispensable the assent of the intellect may be, intellect alone does not constitute the kind of faith that Scripture requires of us. Faith, as revealed to us in

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scripture, is much more than the mere assent of the intellect to revealed truth; it is the practical submission of the entire person to the guidance and control of such truth. The implications of faith require action in the form of deeds or behavioral change, otherwise faith becomes void and empty. This leads us to the second element of faith, the ethical element.

ETHICS.

Ethical faith carries the greatest weight according to scripture. Faith requires a response to our beliefs. An example of this is found in James 2:19. James is talking about faith and the deeds of faith. In verse 19 he states, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder." Here James states the intellectual element of faith without the ethical element (works) of faith is a dead faith. Demons believe and know there is one God (intellect), but do not feel morally bound to alter their lives as a result of that knowledge (ethical). Their faith is dead!

Another example of a dead faith may be the case of certain Christian cults which claim to accept Christ as their personal savior (intellect) but continue with the cultic practices of Sabbatarianism or other legalistic customs which are contrary to the gospel of Christ (Rom. 3:21-22). Intellectual faith cannot stand on its own merits alone. Faith is comprised of the intellectual and the ethical elements simultaneously. Intellectual faith without the ethical imperative of action nullifies, voids then destroys faith. Intellect cannot stand alone. James tells us intellectual faith is dead (Jn. 3:18-21, Rom. 2:7, 4:5, Heb. 11, Jam. 2:26).

So, we see that faith is something that can die, be lost or depart from us (Lk. 18:8, 22:32). Faith therefore must be put into practical use. The ethical imperative for action is also impressed upon us by the direct testimony and sanction of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:11, 31:33, 16:8-11, 1Jn. 5:10-11). Faith therefore is not truly blind because the Holy Spirit imbues us with confidence and trust in obeying God. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit which brings people to renounce themselves, their behavior and to believe the gospel. Grace comes to those who believe the gospel by and through the faith of Jesus Christ "in us" for the forgiveness of sins and salvation. By completely yielding ourselves to Christ we become new creations "in Christ" with the resultant new life or new way of living. The Spirit bears witness to our acceptance with God.

Faith is a living and growing aspect of the Christian's life. Faith is dynamic because it is a "condition" for salvation and a "result" of salvation. We see that faith must be practiced or it may become useless and obsolete. It is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved. Faith for salvation is having the light of the Gospel dwell within us; believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; submitting completely to the authority of Christ, and putting our complete and exclusive trust in Him for salvation (Jn. 3:15-16).

Faith is also a result of salvation. Faith is deepened and developed through the influence of the Holy Spirit by our "in Christ" position. Although the essential quality of faith remains unchanged, faith continues to grow in its steadfastness and reliability (Lk. 17:5-6). As the Word of God is studied and its contents spiritually comprehended faith becomes broader and richer in the truths and facts that it grasps. That is why faith as it appears in its

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earliest manifestations as well as in its completion, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Christ, the Alpha and Omega is the origin and completion of faith.

However, it is essential to remember that we are saved by "GRACE" through faith in Jesus Christ. We must never confuse faith with grace. We obtain grace through faith. It is not our faith in Jesus but the gift of God's faith in us that allows us to *actively* receive His grace and Salvation.

SAVING FAITH.

Saving faith is the wrought confidence in God's promises and provisions in Christ for the salvation of sinners. Saving faith leads a person to trust solely in the person and work of our Savior Jesus Christ. (Jn. 3:16, 5:24)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God: not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph. 2:8-10

Saving faith is a "gift" from God which gives the believer the unchangeable and unforfeitable "in Christ" position (Rom. 8:1, 11:29, Eph. 1:3). Salvation is the result of our "in Christ" position. The three verses quoted above (Eph. 2:8-10) say a mouthful concerning faith and salvation and the duty of those who are saved. God reveals in verse 10 "WHY" we have been "newly created" in Christ Jesus: to do good deeds that God has ordained for us. Works then is the fruit of Salvation, not the means or condition of Salvation.

SANCTIFYING FAITH.

Sanctifying faith is the knowledge of and trust in our "in Christ" position (Rom 6:1-10). This kind of faith allows us to "experience possession" of Christ (Rom. 6:11). In Ephesians, chapters one through three, Paul sets forth the believer's "in Christ" position while in chapters four through six he tells us how to "experience" that position. Sanctifying faith commandeers the power of God for conforming our position "in Christ" to our enjoyment of the blessings of that position. Sanctifying faith, however, should never be confused with "Saving Faith." Sanctifying faith is the absolute knowledge and belief of our "in Christ" position. All believers who have accepted Christ as their personal Savior have a position of sanctification or "sustainment" in Christ (Compare 1Cor. 1:2 with 3:1-3, 5:5). We are sanctified by our "in Christ" position and become "new creations." This "new creation in Christ" compels us to practice a lifestyle consistent with our sanctification and "to do good works." (Eph. 4:1, Col. 3:1-4)

SERVING FAITH.

Serving faith, which acts upon the truth of divinely bestowed spiritual gifts compels us to confidently use the gifts God has divinely enabled (or appointed) for us to do in His service. This divinely enabling faith is "pro-active" by nature and a personal and individual matter (Rom. 14:22). It compels us to perform deeds and acts consistent with our gifts, salvation and Christian calling. Serving faith, provokes us to walk in a newness of life.

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This new life will have a "re-active" aspect as well. The reactive aspect of serving faith will abandon attitudes, behaviors, practices and deeds that are no longer applicable to our new lives in Christ - including the abandonment of past religious beliefs and practices which may be contrary to the gospel and our new life in Christ.

All believers who accept Christ as their Savior (Saving Faith) are what they are because of their "in Christ" position (Sanctifying Faith) regardless of when or if they ever realize that they are truly and literally "in Christ" or not. Once awareness of our "in Christ" position manifests, we are stimulated to act upon (Serving Faith) our understanding of that position. Only when our faith turns into action will we truly begin to enjoy the benefits of our faith in daily living.

Those who receive the divine testimony and yield themselves to full assent become partakers of heavenly knowledge. That knowledge comes by faith, but it is nonetheless knowledge. The scriptures recognize the difference between those who walk by faith and those who walk by sight. Therefore the distinction is made between the objects and methods of sense-perception (reason) with those of faith. There is also a noted difference between the acquisition of human learning and philosophy with that of divine revelation. Scripture represents true believers as people who know the things that are freely given of God. Christ tells us, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 8:10. Jn. 8:31-32, 1Cor. 1:5-6, 21-30, 2:9-16, Eph. 1:17, 1Tim. 2:4)

SUMMARY

Faith and belief are intimately connected in scripture.

We obtain salvation by grace through faith.

Faith has two distinct elements: intellectual and ethical.

The ethical element of faith is action oriented and carries greater importance in scripture than the intellectual element of faith.