

**What does John say about “faith”?**  
**A Series on What does Faith Mean: Part 4**

The subject of “faith” has several motifs within the New Testament. One method towards understanding the subject is by examining what the speakers, who used the terms frequently such as the apostle John, apostle Paul and Jesus Christ, meant.

Of the “pistis” word group, the apostle John uses the Greek terms “pistis”, “pistos” and “pisteuō” in the following manner:

**Pistis**

The apostle John uses the Greek noun “pistis,” translated as “faith” infrequently and only in five occasions (1 John 5:4, Rev 2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12). The apostle John generally understands “faith” as meaning the act of accepting Jesus Christ and His message.

**Pistos**

When the apostle John used the adjective form of “pistis,” which is “pistos” (i.e. 1 John 1:9; 3 John 1:5; Rev 1:5; 2:10, 13; 3:14; 17:14; 19:11), he applied the term to Jesus Christ, His witnesses, and His church. The translation “faithful” is understood in the Semitic sense namely that the act of believing assumes the character of fidelity. The apostle John sees the adjective “faithful” as having the character of being trustworthy, loyal and steadfast.

**Pisteuō**

The apostle John used the verb form “pisteuō,” translated as “believe” and sometimes as “trust” or “commit,” ninety eight times in the gospel and nine times in 1 John. By stressing its verb form, John presents faith as an intentional act of believing; it is not simply an idea, subjective feeling or the mere assent of a proposition. “Believe” meant the active acceptance of the message about Jesus (i.e. John 1:12; 2:11, 23; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40, 47; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:35, 36; 10:42; 11:25, 26, 45, 48; 12:11, 36, 37, 42, 44, 46; 14:1, 12; 16:9; 17:20).

While the apostle John used “pisteuō” with the preposition “eis” or with the dative case (John 2:21; 4:21, 50; 5:24, 38, 46-47; 8:31, 45-46; 14:11), it meant materially the same thing “believe in.”

In extrabiblical papyri “pisteuō eis” meant “surrender” or “submission to.” For example, *a slave was sold into the name of the god of a temple*, meant that the slave became a temple servant. While the apostle John does not appear to share this usage, there is the idea that to “believe in Jesus Christ” means to “renounce oneself” or “consider oneself to be a servant of Jesus Christ”.

“Pisteuō” with the preposition “eis” or with the dative case relates to the acceptance of a person’s statements as true and is a phase of believing that grows naturally out of trust in the person.

In essence, “believe Jesus when He preaches” (John 8:40-45) or “believe in His word (John 2:22; 5:47) is equivalent to “believe in the Jesus who is proclaimed.”

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The apostle John wanted the world to know that the One proclaimed is the Jesus who met them and preached what God will do through Christ.

What the Gospel proclaims as an event, God’s act of atonement, is itself the very character of God’s word.

In John 1:1 (“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*”), the apostle John develops the thought that God’s word and act are unity. Through the Bible, human beings meet God’s act, and through God’s act is the basis for the Bible.

Of the gospels, the book of John stands unique in making this explicit association: the unity of Jesus Christ with God’s word.

References:

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