

Brent Schmidt: *Pistis* or Faith

Let's review grace a little before we start learning about *pistis*. You guys remember *charis* or *grace* is a gift and one of the great gifts that we may receive from our Heavenly Father is understanding. Knowledge that leads to understanding is very important in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you've ever studied any philosophy, the term epistemology, from *epistome* with the -*pist* stem means knowing. Epistemology is the study of how you know what you know. And so, for instance, if you were studying epistemology, you might use an example of something like this table here to discuss your knowledge of its existence. Well, how do you know the table is there? You have your five senses and there are many of other ways that you can know things. Now *epistome* is related to the same root as *pistis* and both refer to how we know what we know. *Pistis* or faith is about approximately knowing what is true, being persuaded or being true to what we know. We also would use the adjective faithful or being full of faith regarding action according to this knowledge.

The Prophet Joseph Smith correctly taught, and it's very much based on how *pistis* or *faith* was understood in the ancient world, that we are not saved in ignorance. *Pistis* is also a great gift of our Heavenly Father. I hope today to describe what grace and faith are, what they meant in different centuries, in order to inform our view of how a person in the first-century would have understood these salvation principles. I hope this methodology will help us so we can clearly understand what these terms mean

Similar to the principle of *grace*, as we read the Book of Mormon and as we study the words of the prophets, we can get the ancient sense anyway of what *faith* was and how it was understood. Okay, this term up here on the screen with the asterisk (**bheidh*), is a Proto-Indo-European term and if you study linguistics, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit and Indo-Iranian, all come from this big language family called Indo-European and words for faith all are derived from *bheidh*. The Greek *pisteuein* (to trust) and *peithein* (to persuade) survive in the noun root form *pistis*. All are linguistically related in early times. The Latin equivalents *fides* and *fiscus* and *Fidelia* are from the same Indo-European root and have the same knowledge-based meanings. In linguistics, these words have the same basic consonantal sounds. If we had a lot of time we could get into all the details.

So anyway, we're going to be talking about *pistis* and the Latin version of this same New Testament word is (*fides*). Both in Latin and in Greek, these words have the potential binding influence of knowledge. *Pistis* is not a perfect knowledge. It also means persuasion and being faithful and trusting different relationships with things or individuals. When one is describing knowledge of things or people we are trusting the knowledge we have about them. In religion and in the New Testament *pistis* and related terminology indicates trusting our Heavenly Father and his Son and having relationships with them.

So for the past three years in my free time, what little I have, I've been working on a manuscript of what *pistis* is, how it changed and how it was restored by Joseph Smith. When I first turned it into Jack (John Welch), it was over 300 pages so I've tried to whittle it down to maybe about 240 currently. I'm hoping it will be published soon through *BYU Studies*. Unfortunately I only have about a half an hour and I'll try to just go through some of the main points of how and what *pistis* was and how it was understood by the readers of Paul and others who wrote about it. One of the things we learn from Cicero, who creates the literary Latin language, is action is commonly associated with *pistis* and *fides*. From the Latin writings of Cicero of the first century BC to Saint Isidorus in late Roman times, *fides* was defined as *fit quod dicitur* that literally meant "whatever is said, happens" in an active, vertical, patron/client relationship.

In ancient times *pistis* or *fides* has a very active meaning for these Greeks and Romans who in droves eventually are going to come into the Christian church in the fourth century. Also, if we examine what social sciences say about trust, there are costly demands when we follow Jesus Christ or any religion. Perhaps you are familiar with the work of Rodney Stark. He wrote "trust assists religious devotees to meet the costly demands of religious groups that differ from the easier norms of the surrounding society." So again, this is what *faith* does, it actually helps us to be able to use agency, actively change and to make covenants. Again, we have to have some knowledge and understanding to be persuaded for these steps to happen. These costly demands increase participation within the religious group that occurs in a system of total services that includes giving, receiving and reciprocating. So again, there's reciprocity that also occurs with faith. We are expected to become faithful in these reciprocal relationships. Many ancient commentators mention the centrality of this idea of *pistis* or *fides*. For example, Cicero says faith (*pistis* or *fides*) is foundational; you have to have it or a society can't work.

Now again I'm not a Hebrew scholar. I do have a chapter on faith as used in the Hebrew Old Testament. I did my very best and checked with some friends who are very good at Hebrew, and the Hebrew verbal stem, *'aman* parallels *pistis* very, very closely. However, this is a project for someone else to work on in more detail. The *'aman* lexicon is translated in the Greek Septuagint as *pistis* and it is almost always rendered using the *pist-* forms. There are probably hundreds of examples but I'll just give you a few here.

When Israel obeys, the Lord confirms Abrahamic covenant and *pistis* is constantly used in the Septuagint. In the New Testament *pistis*, like the Hebrew Old Testament, occasionally seems to refer to the first-century, covenant Christian community. If the covenant is broken by Israel, God will avenge the quarrel of his covenant (Leviticus 26:15, 25). The Hebrew *'emunah* from the *'aman* lexicon was used in Nehemiah 10:1 to denote documented committal to renewal of the covenant in Nehemiah's religious reformation. It is also used in the temple in 1 Chronicles 9:22, 26, 31. Psalms 89 comes to be interpreted Messianically and in both Christian and Jewish thought it speaks of this term of establishing a covenant with David. A righteous person lives by faithfulness in a covenant.

In classics we first have oral traditions written down and attributed to Homer that use *pistis* in active senses. In his epics, Homer begins with the proper conduct heroic individuals are expected to have. They're supposed to be faithful to those things that they've learned and know. These knowledge-based *pistis* conventions regulate conduct. Nobles will enter into agreements, sometimes they'll go to battle or they'll arrange marriage through this idea of trust or *pistis*. *Pistis* refers to trusting gods and men. Therefore, when people trust the gods and they're faithful to what they know and to those gods, they're considered *pistos* (the adjectival form) or faithful.

Sophocles discussed the active consulting of the gods to learn desirable courses of action so once the god reveals the course of action, *pistis* is the ability to put faith in the god and follow through with what the god wants. Xenophon links *pistis* with fidelity within friendship. Aristotle commented "there is no stable friendship without fidelity," and fidelity or faithfulness comes with time. So actually it's also very relational, it takes time to develop trust; isn't that true with our friendships today? It certainly takes time to develop friendship.

As we move into the Hellenistic or Greek-like period, Philo asserted that *pistis* blessings include consolation of life, fulfillment of bright hopes, dearth of ills, harvest of goods, rejection of misery, knowledge of piety, inheritance of happiness. Another first century writer, Plutarch, commented that *pistis* is the way to forge new relationships; it creates social bonds that benefit everyone in society. He associated *pistis* as a principle proceeding from justice. Faith becomes a covenant ritual also in Roman texts. Livy frequently mentions this surrender ritual in his great history of Rome, (*deditio in fidem*.) that assists those who decide to capitulate to Roman authority. By coming into a state of faith, Rome can have a new relationship with these conquered groups.

Rome now had these usually vertical relationships with these conquered peoples when they enter in a state of *fides*. Also, Hellenistic philosophers use *pistis* to refer to rhetorical persuasion and we see these nuances in Paul's writing. Paul is trying to persuade his Gentile audience and faith in his time often implies persuasion that things are true. We also find these *pistis* knowledge nuances in scripture of the Restoration which is used to persuade us of things that are true (Alma 32:21). Isocrates remarked the good rhetoricians usually use *pisteis* (in the plural form of *pistis*) to carefully construct their arguments. Faith in Paul's world often meant to rationally think through issues and persuade others. Paul's contemporaries use *pisteis* as the words and actions that represent what is being said and done. Faith is supplemental that way because it supplements us with knowledge as we move along in the road of discipleship. Aristotle synthesizes a lot of classical philosophical thinking. He popularized a theory about persuasive rhetoric based on proofs (*pisteis*). Aristotle occasionally equates *pisteis* in terms of proofs of how you know what you know and how you should follow these kinds of techniques and if you do that, you'll become a good orator.

In the third century in the Septuagint, *pistis* is used to describe an individual's commitment. Much later in Josephus, there are about 195 uses of it with the nuances of a pledge, a covenant or an oath to which people will hopefully be faithful. If you're a gentile Christian convert living in the first century, probably associating with some Jewish Christians, faith has certain covenantal nuances. Teresa Morgan in her recent Oxford book about faith titled *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* argues early Christians probably wanted to use a different word to define their new covenant community. In the Septuagint, the Greek word on the bottom of the powerpoint slide, *hē diathēkē* referred to the Jewish covenant community in the past. Morgan argues that is very likely Paul used *pistis* in contrast to refer to the new covenant of Jesus Christ which is created through his atonement. Often in the Gospels we see the phrase "for my sake," that usually involves faithfulness and Jesus again becomes this faith broker. The trustworthy in-group kin receives total allegiance as Jesus' family once did. Therefore we can actually become the family of Jesus as we have faith in and knowledge of him and become faithful. Also now because we are kin of Jesus, we owe allegiance to him and we can't serve both God's will and anything or anyone else. Jesus teaches this principle very well in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 verse 24.

To demonstrate faith we need to keep Jesus' commandments, give assistance to the poor and the needy and follow him. When we keep his commandments and we do good works, we show we're faithful. In the New Testament in Hebrews, many patriarchs are listed and they become faithful models of discipleship. How do you become faithful? How do you become trustworthy of a God who can now trust you? Follow these patriarchs! Paul personally models faithfulness by his difficult ministry throughout Macedonia and Achaia. Paul was certainly faithful to his apostolic calling.

Pistis is sometimes a three-way relationship between our Heavenly Father, the faithful and Christ. There is this relational triangle in 1st and 2nd Timothy. In the early Christian material, especially the ritual material that survived, baptismal services as they have survived in the apostolic constitutions, contain the phrase "I align myself with Christ and I pledge commitment." The Greek word in this phrase is *pisteuo* and this is basically what converts today say in their baptismal interviews before baptism. In the Restored gospel we know that faith is the first principle of the gospel. First we have faith, then we repent and then we get baptized. We find this same basic sequence of gospel ordinances and principles in this early ritual text.

I collect ancient coins and I was really lucky to get some training in ancient numismatics in graduate school. I brought some of my Roman coins as examples of ancient *pistis*. If anyone is interested and wants to see the genuine coins I have here please talk to me later. Most of them were minted in the west so they're actually Fides denarii (silver coins) while *Pistis* was occasionally depicted in the Roman East. These very coins would have been circulating around the time of John, especially this Nerva coin. Others are from the second and third century and depict Fides, the Roman equivalent of *Pistis*. *Pistis* is a very active goddess. She embodies faithfulness and *Pistis*' sign on Roman coins is a right hand clasp. Learning this detail about right hand symbolism blew my mind as I studied these nuances of faith. Understanding this ritual with

physical token of faith has helped me to appreciate temple ordinances. I won't say exactly how it is related to the temple because temple ordinances are too sacred. In ancient times *pistis* is associated with harmony or Concordia that are portrayed together.

What delightfully surprised me even more about *pistis* iconography is the Latin expression *iunctio dextrarum* or the joining of right hands to represent faith. Depicted on this slide are the second-century emperor and the empress, Antoninus Pius and Faustina the Elder, demonstrating the ideal of faithfulness in marriage. We also see in other *pistis* relationships in Roman society depicted such as the significance of the faithfulness of the army. This other coin is a posthumous religious issue of Constantine. As you probably know, Constantine was the first emperor to legalize Christianity and there has always been some academic debate about whether he really became Christian or not. This coin depicts him as being faithful and active as he rides in a chariot. Constantine is being pulled up into heaven on a chariot by the right hand of God through the veil. Right? There are many representations that depict right hands pulling faithful individuals through the veil in early Christian iconography.

If you read the Roman historian Tacitus, he explains that when you renew right hands, you are symbolically renewing treaties, covenants and oaths. Romans sometimes sent even right hands in effigy before entering contracts. This ritual commonly invited Gentiles into alliance relationships. This ritual is not just in pagan art or iconography, it permeates the New Testament as well. In Galatians 2:9 we have an example of Peter, James and John giving Paul their right hands of the fellowship to ritually endorse Paul's missionary labors among the gentiles. Faithful individuals in Mark sit on Jesus' right hand. There are 166 uses of the right hand teaching fidelity, strength, power in the Hellenistic Jewish world.

When I was little I remember asking my mom why we take the sacrament with the right hand. And my mom probably said "because." The complete answer is we take the sacrament with our right hands to renew our covenants with symbolic fidelity. Understanding the covenantal, fidelity-promoting nuances of *pistis* has helped me appreciate many rituals of the restored gospel.

There has been debate for many decades about the meaning of the phrase *pistis Christou* or the faith or faithfulness of Christ, especially since the Reformation. For many Protestants who believe in imputed righteousness, or the doctrine that Christ's faith becomes everyone's faith, subtly suggests an individual does not need to do anything to become faithful. However, the Greek doesn't support this later doctrinal innovation. Most scholars today believe that *pistis Christou* only refers to the faithfulness of Christ. *Pistis* describes the Lord's faithfulness in the Septuagint, first in the Psalms. The word of God is upright and all his work is done in faithfulness. God's promises to restore Israel and his faithfulness to eventually accomplish this task rest on *pistis*. The synoptic gospels use *pistis*, in an active sense of trust stated in Matthew 23 because *pistis* is a proper characteristic of all the apostles.

Let's now look at some proof texts that our Protestant friends often use to support imputed righteousness and the Rule of Faith. They're actually translated very badly in some ways from the Greek in the King James Translation. We need to appreciate the first-century understandings of *pistis* to properly render these verses' original meaning.

Here's my translation of Galatians 2:15-16 that hopefully expresses Paul's first-century context: "*We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, knowing that a person is not placed in a right relationship with God by works of the law, except by Jesus Christ's faithfulness, we trust in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be placed in a right relationship on the basis of Christ's faithfulness and not on the basis of works of the Mosaic law; because no one will be placed in a right relationship on the basis of works of the Mosaic law.*" Instead of translating *pistis* as faith, I rendered it faithfulness. Christ's faithfulness led to his atonement and we now must trust and faithfully follow Him. Certainly the actions of Mosaic law alone did not necessarily grant many of Paul's contemporaries faith in Christ.

In a first-century context of faith there is no imputed righteousness. Most people have traditionally read the Bible through a medieval Augustinian or a Lutheran or a Calvinistic view and they've translated passages with *pistis* in this way. In Jude verse 3 we read another Protestant faith proof text in the King James Translation that states "contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Again, *pistis* probably refers to a covenant and it means instead "contend for the new covenant which was once delivered to the saints." Hopefully we'll keep our covenants. Jude promotes a client-patron relationship of faithfulness that was associated with first-century *pistis*. In Galatians 1:23, Paul meant "only they were listeners, because he who once persecuted us now is preaching the new covenant which he once was trying to destroy."

In my study of *pistis* I encountered some really notable very early Christian teachings that promote first-century, relational and covenantal faith. They are known today as the Sentences of Sextus. They were so popular they were translated into about twelve languages in late antiquity. Most church fathers of later centuries do not like them, while Pelagius and many of his followers often quoted these second-century texts in their surviving works. There is some evidence that Sextus may have been one of the first bishops in Rome although there's still some debate about who Sextus was.

My translation of parts of these sentences is "a faithful person is a chosen person. A chosen person is a person of God; A person of God is one who is worthy of God. One who is worthy of God does nothing which is unworthy of God. As a person striving to be faithful, you should do nothing which is unworthy of God. One having little faith is unfaithful in a covenant. A person becoming trustworthy by the test of faith is a god in a living human body. An unfaithful man in a covenant is a dead man in a living body. One who is truly faithful does not sin. Trust (*pistis*) is a guide of all good actions." In these sentences we learn when we become faithful and trustworthy within covenants we can become like our Heavenly Father. In contrast, if you're unfaithful, according to the sentences, you're like a dead guy in a living body. The sentences conclude that

the faithful do not sin, they trust Christ and his teachings. *Pistis* becomes a guide of all good actions. *Pistis* should help us to do what's right and become faithful.

So why does *pistis*' meaning change during later Christian history? The influential, third-century pagan philosopher Plotinus defined *pistis* as a mystical and abstract principle. Faith for Plotinus "is in the invisible." He concludes that one's faith is in the immortality of the soul and one's own membership in the divine world. Faith is evolving in this period. The third-century Christian writer Tertullian coins the phrase "Rule of Faith" meaning if you just agree with what the church is teaching you have faith. You guys in the audience do not seem too impressed by this convenient doctrinal innovation. The Rule of Faith stresses just agreeing with the Church and its leaders is to have faith. Thus, centuries after the death of the apostles, *pistis* begins to become an inner, mysterious emotion that has nothing to do with knowledge, understanding or covenants. Tertullian asserts that faith is the "rule by which it is believed that there is one God only and no other beside him, Creator of the world, who brought forth everything from nothing through his Word, which was sent out before everything." Faith is changed to agree with the pagan philosophies of contemporary neo-Platonic circles.

In the fifth century Augustine muddles the waters even further. He asserts that faith is just given to Christians with a few words in a creed, so if you just say the creed, you then have faith. Believing in the creeds is easy and you are thereby saved for doing so. Augustine sums up faith in two abstract phrases referring to emotional belief: *Fides quae creditur* and *fides qua creditur*, "the faith which is believed" the propositional content of faith and "the faith by which it is believed." Both formulas define faith as mere belief for most Protestants and Catholics until now. Augustine's theological innovations made faith an easy, casual and inner belief for most Christians.

Pelagius, Augustine's contemporary, correctly taught that *pistis* or faith was equated with obedience, righteousness, and good works. Baptism is actually what justifies, not faith. Pelagius asserted Christians are forgiven when they are baptized and those who seek baptism trust from the whole heart. Pelagius had many followers who held traditional views about faith but they were soon silenced. Pelagius struggled to go along with the creeds that had become more abstract by the fourth century. By the Middle Ages, people simply accept the teachings of the Church and then they have faith. Faith is getting really weird isn't it?

Thomas Aquinas' definition of faith is also quite strange and abstract since belief itself became "faith's inner act" which transformed the intellect and its public confession was the outer act of it. Martin Luther asserts "he who through faith is righteous shall live" or *sola fide* meaning salvation occurs by faith alone. However, *sola fide* is an oxymoron because faith is never alone. It is relational and covenantal. By the time of the reformation, faith has become quite different from *pistis*. John Calvin defines faith is something passive although it was active in antiquity. Faith for Calvin, recovers God's favor and there are dozens of more abstract and strange definitions of faith promoted during the Reformation. There's recent movement in New Testament scholarship called "The New Perspective of Paul" that attempts to restore what the

teachings of Paul meant in their first-century context. It's really, really good academic development. But what is so much better is the restoration of active faith and agency by Jesus Christ and his prophets through the prophet Joseph Smith.

In the Book of Mormon, we don't find the Rule of Faith or *sola fide*. Instead we read about relational and covenantal faith. In the Doctrine and Covenants there are a few potential Rule of Faith verses. However, in the Doctrine and Covenants in section 1 verse 24 the Lord says that Joseph Smith learns things in his language and faith by his time meant a body of beliefs. In his history, Joseph Smith writes about his father's family belonging to the Presbyterian faith, because now faith has become a religion through the influence of the Rule of Faith.

I'm grateful for the understanding that we gain about the essence of active, relational faith from prophets and revelation in the Book of Mormon. As we study these things hopefully we'll become faithful. We can continually renew our covenants by worthily taking the sacrament. We should get to the temple often and faithfully serve Heavenly Father and others. Understanding first-century *pistis* has made me desire to attend the temple a lot more often. Again, if you like to see my Roman coins, I'd be happy to show them to you. And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.