

FAITH (πίστις, *pistis*). Reliance upon and trust in God; a central emphasis of Christianity.

Introduction

Christianity is largely characterized by its emphasis on faith and beliefs. Christians are commonly called “believers,” and a commitment to Christianity typically involves a confession of faith. The centrality of faith in Christianity reflects the biblical significance of faith. For example, the author of Hebrews notes that one of the basic teachings of early Christianity involves “faith towards God” (Heb 6:1 NRSV). Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith also demonstrates the Bible’s emphasis on faith. Based on Paul’s teaching about faith in Romans and Galatians, Martin Luther argued that Christians must understand their salvation as *sola fide*—“by faith alone.”

At times, this emphasis on faith has degenerated into a checklist of beliefs that disregard a person’s life and practices. However, the biblical concept of faith is not meant to boil Christianity down to a set of religious ideas. The letter of James emphatically critiques such a distortion.

The Three Dimensions of Faith

There appear to be three distinct concepts of faith in Scripture: covenantal faith; epistemological faith; and eschatological faith. These concepts regularly overlap, and multiple dimensions of faith can be found in the same passage.

Covenantal Faith: Faith as Covenantal Commitment

The biblical language of faith concerns a relationship of faithfulness and cooperation (Leclerc, “Faith in Action,” 184–95). The concept of the covenant, which is especially explicit in the Old Testament, informs the biblical writers’ use of the language of faith. To have faith in God or Jesus is to be faithful to a covenantal bond, which is initiated by God and bound according to appropriate promises and expectations on both sides. The command for Christians to have faith is not merely a cerebral exercise or eager wish, but a command with the expectation of fidelity and trust. This definition of faith is apparent in Josh 24:14: When the Israelites renew their covenant to the Lord after taking possession of Canaan, Joshua demands, “Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord” (NRSV).

Epistemological Faith: Faith as Spiritual Perception

New Testament authors like Paul promote a concept of faith that is opposed to the common phrase “blind faith.” For example, Paul affirms that Christians live “by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7 NRSV). With this phrase, he refers to Christians’ capacity for a kind of spiritual perception that allows them to interpret the world in a godly way. God’s people are able to see and perceive His work in the world, while the rest of the world ignores or rejects it (Hays, “Salvation by Trust,” 218–223).

Eschatological Faith: Faith as the Living Eschatological Expression of Christian Hope

While faith in the present involves seeing as God sees, eschatological faith is necessary because sin has corrupted human understanding (Rom 1:18–32). To see properly is a dimension of present faith, but God promises that all that is hidden will be revealed when Christ returns (at the Parousia; 1 Cor 4:5). On the day of judgment, the righteous will be honored and rewarded, and the reprobate and corrupt will be exposed and punished. Part of Christian faith, according to Scripture, is living in light and anticipation of that “day of illumination.”

The Concept of “Faith” in the Old Testament

Christianity’s emphasis on faith is largely based on the themes and theological distinctives of the New Testament. However, Jesus and the New Testament writers’ teachings about faith are built on the foundation of the Old Testament—particularly in its descriptions of the covenantal life of Israel. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) employs the term πίστις (*pistis*) to translate several Hebrew words:

1. אֱמוּנָה (*'mn*), “trust” or “reliability.”
2. אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*), “trust” or “reliability.” In contexts related to human relationships, this term “often refers to those who have the capacity to remain stable (i.e., faithful) amid the unsettling circumstances of life, realizing God’s truth has established them” (Wilson, 183). For example, the term is used of Moses’ hands as Aaron and Hur supported him on the hill at Rephidim (Exod 17:12). Thus, his hands were firm, steady, and reliable.
3. אֱמֶת (*emeth*), “faithfulness” or “truth.” Sakenfeld glosses this term as “loyalty” when it regards covenantal relationship and defines it as *demonstrated* loyalty, or “faithfulness in action.” The term frequently appears alongside the Hebrew term for “lovingkindness” (חֶסֶד, *chesed*) in describing Israel’s God (e.g., Gen 32:10; Neh 9:17; Pss 25:10; 86:15; 98:3).

Brueggemann stresses that the language of “faith” in the Old Testament is everywhere associated with covenant. Within that theological construct, “faith” has less to do with particular ideas than it does with the integrity of a relationship. He states, “‘Faith’ concerns attentive engagement in a promissory relationship. Only rarely does the Old Testament suggest that ‘faith’ is a body of teaching that Israel is to ‘believe.’ Israel’s faith does not necessarily lack normative substance nor is it vacuous, but the relationship is more elemental than the substantive teaching which reflects upon that relationship. That in the Old Testament faith is regarded as ‘trust in’ is more elemental than ‘assent to’ is a matter often discounted in formal theological articulations, but ‘trust’ is not to be understood primarily in emotive terms. Trust is a practice that entails obedience to Torah [the law] and its specific requirements. Israel’s fidelity to Yahweh, not unlike fidelity in marriage, thus consists of concrete acts that take the other party with defining seriousness” (Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith*, 78).

Aside from this primary sense of covenantal faith, the Old Testament contains some examples of epistemological faith. An example is Prov 3:5–7: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.” Here the sage warns the reader that the sinful mind is distorted, and that only relying on the Lord will lead one on the proper path (Prov 14:12).

“Faith” in Classical and Hellenistic Jewish Usage

In its broadest usage, the Greek word πίστις (*pistis*) referred to conviction, commitment, and faithfulness. Spicq explains that πίστις (*pistis*) tended to appear in the papyri in a legal context, carrying a meaning of “guarantee, security” (Lexicon, 3.110–116). In classical Greek, words with the πιστ (*pist*)- root were not commonly used for religious beliefs. However, Lindsay argues that there is a precedent for the use of the word group regarding “trusting and relying upon God or upon God’s promises” (*Josephus and Faith*, 18).

In the Septuagint, the term πίστις (*pistis*) often corresponds to the Hebrew term אֱמֶת (*’mn*) and carries the meaning “faithfulness” or “trueness” (e.g., the integrity and constancy that allows people to feel secure). An example is Prov 3:3: “Let not mercy and truth (πίστις, *pistis*) forsake you, but bind them around your neck” (NRSV). The term πίστις (*pistis*) can also mean “truth” (translating אֱמֶת, *emeth*), as in Jer 7:28: “This is the nation which has not listened to the voice of the Lord, nor received correction: truth (πίστις, *pistis*) has failed from their mouth.”

Sirach has the most occurrences of πίστις (*pistis*) in the deuterocanonical literature, most of which relate to advice concerning the wisdom of loyalty and trustworthiness in relationships. Sirach 22:23 is particularly insightful: “Gain the trust of your neighbor in his poverty, so that you may rejoice with him in his prosperity. Stand by him in time of distress, so that you may share with him in his inheritance” (NRSV). The first clause could be translated literally as: “Prove yourself trustworthy (πίστις, *pistis*) in poverty with your neighbor” (NRSV). This points to a kind of bond of friendship, perhaps involving sharing in the financial burden of his distressed neighbor. Additional occurrences of πίστις (*pistis*) in the Apocrypha include:

- once in the Wisdom of Solomon (Wis. Sol. 3:14);
- twice in the Psalms of Solomon (Pss. Sol. 8:28; 17:40);
- three occurrences in 1 Maccabees (1 Macc 10:27, 37; 14:35). These occurrences are properly glossed as “loyalty” or “faithfulness.”

Faith according to the Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels

Jesus initiates His ministry by proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15 NRSV). With this statement, Jesus calls for a serious commitment to His message and invites disciples to follow Him. The collocation of repentance and belief points to a radical reorientation of life for the Jews to whom Jesus preached. In this context, the call to belief refers less to treating Jesus as God and more to accepting that the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s promise has arrived, whereby He has come to break into the sin-dominated world and restore the covenantally unfaithful people of Israel.

Jews may have found it particularly challenging to have faith in Jesus’ gospel message because Jesus came from humble origins and did not seem to have the training and prowess that many expected of the messiah. The invitation to faith for first-century Jews was thus a call to allegiance—to accept the immanence of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the language of faith relates to trust in God and in Jesus (Mark 4:40; 11:22–24; Luke 8:25; Matt 21:21–22), with some concern for its relationship to divine judgment (Luke 18:8). However, Jesus' miracles are of greatest interest in regard to the subject of faith. The Synoptic Gospels record two particular phrases that connect healing with faith:

1. "Let it [the requested miracle] be done for you according to your faith" (Matt 8:13; 9:29 NRSV).
2. "Your faith has healed you" (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42 NRSV).

The potential for modern misunderstanding and misapplication of this material necessitates further discussion on the relationship between faith and healing and how it should be understood from a theological perspective. Four important points can be made:

1. The miracle traditions in the Synoptic Gospels focus on the dynamic appearance of the good news and how it claims victory over evil and the damage of sin. The miracle stories point toward true faith in God through Jesus, not the joy and satisfaction of the person being healed.
2. While Jesus commends the faith of the ill (or his friends; see Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5), deeper faith does not guarantee physical health or security. For example, John the Baptist is portrayed as strong in faith, yet he was beheaded and remained dead despite Jesus' approval of his ministry.
3. The faith of the person is not necessarily orthodox or complete, and sometimes even involves only a rudimentary understanding of the identity of Jesus. In most people He heals, Jesus observes and commends their resolve to seek Him in their darkest hour. The people Jesus heals recognize His power and authority, but many of them do not understand the bigger picture of what God has done in Jesus or what He will do through Jesus' death and resurrection. Culpepper remarks that the Gospel of Mark "measures faith not by its orthodoxy but by its determination, courage, and persistence" (*Mark*, 77).
4. The Gospels should not be considered guidebooks for healing. While there is no reason to doubt that Jesus did perform healing miracles as the Gospels record, these stories seem to carry a symbolic meaning as well. Donald Hagner argues that they point to "the greatest healing experienced by the Church, the 'healing' of salvation" (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.251). This association is more obvious, as the verb for "healed" (σώζω, *sōzō*) is also used for "saved" in the spiritual and eternal sense.

The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John uniquely emphasizes the language of believing, as evidenced by the pervasiveness of the term "believing" (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) and the absence of the noun "faith" (πίστις, *pistis*). John has a Christ-centered agency motif, in which trust in God demonstrates itself in belief in Jesus. This is evident in John 6:29: "This is the work of God, that you may believe in him whom he has sent" (John 12:44; 14:1).

Statements emphasizing the importance and results of belief in Jesus bookend John's Gospel. At the beginning John states, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). He associates believing with receiving,

which divulges his relational perspective on faith (i.e., “covenantal faith”). Then, at the close of his Gospel, John explains, “These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31 NRSV).

Additionally, like the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John links healing and belief. Yet rather than rehearsing accounts of people approaching Jesus with requests for healing, John’s Gospel portrays Jesus taking the initiative to perform signs (σημεῖα, *sēmeia*) to foster belief (John 2:23; 4:50; Thompson, “Signs and Faith,” 89–108).

Senses of Faith in the Gospels

Covenantal faith is central to the faith language of all four Gospels. Jesus’ calls for repentance and belief are covenantal language, beckoning Israel to turn away from covenantal infidelity and to return to true obedience to God. The call to obedience, though, is not centered on fulfilling the demands of Torah but on following Jesus Himself.

Epistemological faith also is featured in the Gospels: While many people encounter Jesus, the most well-trained Jewish leaders appear blind to His true identity (John 8:24). Alternatively, the most unlikely men and women show great faith (Matt 8:10; Matt 15:28; Luke 7:9), and the disciples seem to teeter back and forth (Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25). In the Gospel of John in particular, the Beloved Disciple is held up as the model believer who is able to perceive the right things at the right time. For example, John recounts both Peter and the Beloved Disciple visiting the empty tomb and seeing the discarded linen wrappings, but it only records that the Beloved Disciple “saw and believed” (John 20:6–8).

Perhaps the strongest statement emphasizing epistemological faith comes during the risen Jesus’ encounter with the so-called “doubting Thomas,” where Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29 NRSV). While Jesus performed visible signs during His ministry for others to see and believe, such signs could be abused and misunderstood. In John, Jesus praises the kind of unseeing faith that believes Jesus is the crucified and risen Messiah and Lord who alone saves.

The idea of eschatological faith is less prevalent in the Gospels, but it is present. The beatitudes present the concept of eschatological faith in teaching that the poor, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted should be considered blessed by God and will be rewarded (Matt 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23).

Faith in Paul’s Writings

Paul’s letters contain the vast majority of the occurrences of the term “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) in the New Testament. The term appears over 60 times in Romans and Galatians alone. He draws on various senses of the term in his writings and shows both continuity and opposition to the Jewish sense of the term of his time.

Faith and Not Sight

One of Paul’s most well-known statements regarding faith occurs in 2 Cor 5:7: “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (NRSV). In popular culture this verse serves as comfort in response to inexplicable circumstances, such as a disaster or the sudden death of a loved one. The verse must be read in context to gain a true sense of what Paul intended with this statement.

The letter of 2 Corinthians has a terse and serious tone, as Paul defends his ministry from those who spoke against it due to his sufferings. Paul defended his honor against super-apostles who questioned his authority and the effectiveness of his ministry. Paul's opponents—as well as some Corinthian believers who were convinced by their arguments—viewed Paul as weak and impotent.

Paul challenges the Corinthian believers to see him and his ministry not from culturally conditioned standards but by the criteria established by the cross of Christ (2 Cor 13:4). By viewing the world from Christ's perspective, one sees worldly power as vapid and weakness as true power (2 Cor 12:9–10). In this context, Paul encourages epistemological faith, where believers are meant to engage an additional sense that transcends their natural faculties. Paul draws on similar ideas in 1 Corinthians, where he wrote, “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23 NRSV). For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24 NRSV).

Justification by Faith Alone

The phrase “justification by faith,” which figures prominently in Romans and Galatians, is particularly distinctive of Protestant Christianity (e.g., Rom 3:26, 28; 4:5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24). In popular understanding, this phrase has been understood to mean salvation by acceptance of Jesus' self-sacrifice for human sin, without personal merit. While there are a few places where Paul makes clear that God's gifts of grace and salvation are freely given (Rom 4:4–5; Eph 2:8–9), it is necessary to understand the meaning of justification by faith in the first-century Jewish context of Paul's ministry.

Covenantal Dimension of Faith. Hays defines justification in Scripture as “the event whereby persons are set or declared to be in right relation to God” (“Faith,” 3.1129). He traces the New Testament usage back to its legal and covenantal context in the Old Testament, where justification refers to proper standing with the God of Israel. Thus, justification is a relational term that refers to a status of “faithful adherence to the structure of obligations established by the covenant” (Hays, “Faith,” 3.1129). God expected obedience to the Torah that He had given them, but Israel repeatedly failed to maintain loyalty to the covenant.

Aligning with this Old Testament usage, Jews of Paul's time seemed to view faith (πίστις, *pistis*) in reference to relational or covenantal fidelity. Josephus, for example, uses faith (πίστις, *pistis*) quite often with the meaning of covenantal pledge. For example, he writes of King Josiah that “when [the people of Israel] had gathered together, he first read to them the holy books; after which he stood upon a pulpit, in the midst of the multitude, and obliged them to make a covenant (πίστεις, *pisteis*), with an oath, that they would worship God, and keep the laws of Moses” (*Antiquities* 10.63). The translator of this passage, William Whiston, chose to render πίστεις (*pisteis*) (literally “faiths” or “acts of faithfulness”) as “covenant” (Neh 9:38 [Neh 10:1 LXX]). This is consistent with a wider use of faith (πίστις, *pistis*) that even involved trusteeship regarding appointment to both public and private managerial positions (Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.2.1; 12.25; Polybius, *Histories* 5.41.2).

In reference to Abraham, Philo of Alexandria comments that “God, admiring this man for his faith (πίστις, *pistis*) in him, gives him a pledge (πίστις, *pistis*) in return, namely a confirmation by oath of the gifts which he had promised him; no longer conversing with him as God might

with man, but as one friend to another” (Philo, *On the Life of Abraham* 273). Philo presents the idea of God having faith toward us. In this sense, the language of πίστις (*pistis*) is also relational (or covenantal).

Thus, from a Hellenistic Jewish perspective, the most natural reading of Paul’s language of justification “by faith” (Gal 2:16) is to see Paul as affirming the necessity of covenantal or relational faithfulness and loyalty.

Cognitive Dimension of Faith. The word “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) also holds a strong cognitive connotation for Paul, where faith is something you hold with your mind. For example, Paul writes, “Just as we have the same spirit of faith (πίστις, *pistis*) that is in accordance with Scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak” (2 Cor 4:13 NRSV). Here, faith is primarily a cognitive function from which speech and action flows.

In recognizing this cognitive dimension of the word “faith,” a pattern is visible whereby Paul shows an inherent relationship between belief and action, thought and deed, faith and obedience. For example:

- He rejoices and thanks God at the remembrance in prayer of the Thessalonians’ “work of faith” (NRSV) or “work that comes from faith” (CEB; 1 Thess 1:3; compare 2 Thess 1:11).
- He rejoices with the Philippians even while contemplating that his life may end “as a libation over the sacrifice and offering of your faith” (Phil 2:17).
- He declares to the Romans his apostolic mission to the Gentiles to establish the “obedience of faith” (NRSV), probably best understood as “faith-driven obedience” (see CEB).

Thus, while Paul held to the sense of faith as covenantal fidelity, he also allowed it to convey a cognitive sense. However, to say that faith has a cognitive element is not to restrict faith to the mind. Paul understood that for something to take shape in action, the mind must guide the will and body.

Paul, Torah, and Jesus. Paul aligned with non-Christian Jews in his understanding of faith as covenantal faith. He differed from non-Christian Jews in his belief that faith in Jesus Christ—rather than works of the law—could lead to justification before God. The common understanding among Jews was that they were justified by faithfulness to Yahweh, primarily demonstrated through obedience to Torah. J. C. Beker explains the Jewish perspective on faith and Torah in this way: “Judaism does not substitute the law for God’s grace, or human achievement for the righteousness of God, or works for faith. To the contrary, faith is a cardinal dogma for the Jew as the daily recital of the confession (the Shema) discloses: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut 6:4). The object of Jewish faith is the God ‘who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist’ (Rom 4:17). This confession of faith as belief now embodies itself as faithfulness and endurance, that is, as ‘covenant-keeping,’ through obedience to the *mizwoth*—‘the works of the law.’ Furthermore, faith is not antithetical to rewards or ‘merit,’ because it is inherent in God’s righteous nature that faith will be rewarded in the age to come for its steadfast endurance” (Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 268). Paul’s unlinking of faith and Torah (νόμος, *nomos*) was one of the major causes of contention between himself and his Jewish Christian opponents. While obedience to Torah was how one

demonstrated faith before the time of Christ, at and after His appearance, death, and resurrection, demonstration of faith shifted toward worship of and obedience to Jesus Christ.

Paul often abbreviates his expression of this idea by contrasting works of law with faith (Rom 3:27–28; Gal 3:12). This laconic expression has led to much confusion in the history of the interpretation of Paul's thought. Paul's opponents in Galatia would not have disagreed that justification requires faith. They may have taken issue with his criticism of the law's role in justification and his exclusive focus on Christ.

Paul's Perspective on Faith and Works of the Law

In his writings, Paul refers to Jewish orientation to Torah as works of the law and upholds faith (πίστις, *pistis*) as the alternative route. Thus, Paul is doing more than swapping out Christ for Torah. He seems to direct his readers away from a work (ἔργον, *ergon*) perspective and toward a faith (πίστις, *pistis*) perspective.

However, Paul was not against works in general. He explains that final judgment will involve the evaluation of works (Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 3:13–15). Paul also expects the people of God to “labor (ἔργον, *ergon*) for the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). Most revealing of all, Ephesians 2:10 explains that believers are “created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” Yet he cautions against boasting in these works. In Romans 4:2 he says that if Abraham were justified “by works, he has something to boast about.” Paul associates works of the law with the temptation to inflate and rely on oneself (compare Rom 3:27).

Paul seems to express a deeper concern on this matter in Gal 3:1–5, where he contrasts “doing the works of the law” with “believing what you heard” (Gal 3:2, 5). His praise of believing and hearing may pertain to the merits of a fresh sensitivity and openness to the presence and revelation of God. To hear and believe requires a person to listen. Paul may have thought that treating works of the law as the primary context of covenantal obedience could result in a routine cycle of worship. He emphasizes that God's mighty work among the Galatians happened at the belief in what they heard, and not the “doing of the works of the law” (Gal 3:5).

Faith and Relationship with God

Paul also seems to speak of faith in the sense of an unmediated relationship with God through Christ (e.g., Gal 3:8, 11, 12, 14, 23–25, 26). In this sense, Paul views Torah as having regulated the covenantal life of Israel as a limited, temporary measure until the coming of Christ. Performing works of the law maintained Israel within the covenant, but that platform could not ultimately deal with the problem of sin. Thus, in the old covenant, God had to show patience by leaving the sins committed beforehand unpunished (Rom 3:25), holding them in check until the redemptive and bondage-breaking work of Christ.

The “PistisChristou” Debate

There is vigorous debate regarding the proper interpretation of the phrase πίστewς Χριστοῦ (*pisteōs Christou*) in Paul's writings (Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9; Rom 3:22; Gal 2:20; 3:22). There are two common options regarding the syntax of the genitive form of Χριστοῦ (*Christou*):

1. objective genitive reading—results in the translation “faith *in* Christ.” Under this reading, for example, Gal 2:16 would read, “yet we know that a person is justified not by works of the law but *through faith in Jesus Christ*” (NRSV).
2. subjective genitive reading—results in the translation “faithfulness *of* Christ.” Under this reading, Gal 2:16 would read, “yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but *by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ*” (NET).

Determining the correct reading depends more on literary and theological context than syntactical insight. Both of the above interpretations have a distinctive theological focus. The objective genitive reading emphasizes human faith and reliance on Jesus Christ. Thus, it is sometimes called the anthropological reading. The subjective-genitive reading is also known as the Christological view because it concentrates on the efficacy of the perfect obedience of Christ, which enacts salvation. Both emphases would align with Paul’s teaching that righteousness is reckoned to the person who expresses and lives out faith in Jesus Christ, acknowledging His perfect sacrifice and eternal lordship.

Faith as a Fruit of the Spirit and a Spiritual Gift

Paul also speaks of faith as a fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gift. In Gal 5:22 he lists faith among the fruit of the Spirit, with the term variably translated as faithfulness (e.g., NRSV, NASB, NET, NIV, ASV). The translation “faithfulness” makes good sense here given that the list contains virtues and ethical qualities.

In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to faith as a spiritual gift along with wisdom, knowledge, healing, and prophecy (1 Cor 12:8–10). Paul’s lack of elaboration here makes it unclear what he means by faith. In 1 Corinthians 13 he refers to what seems to be the highest reaches of this gift—“all faith”—such that the gifted one could even move mountains (1 Cor 13:2). Thus, he seems to speak of something other than saving faith, which is available to anyone. The faith he speaks of is meant to benefit the Church and pertains in some way to God’s miraculous work through that person.

Hebrews on Faith and Hope

Hebrews emphasizes the theme of faith (see Abraham, 65–75). The Greek terms for faith (πίστις, *pistis*) and to believe (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) occur more than 30 times in the text, with the majority of occurrences in Heb 11. Beginning with the statement “Now faith (πίστις, *pistis*) is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), Heb 11 goes on to commend biblical people who trusted God and pursued Him passionately despite obstacles (Heb 11:6). The letter predominantly focuses on faith that trusts in God’s promises of restoration and reward (eschatological faith; Baker, “Hebrews,” 439–45), some instances of covenantal faith are also evident (e.g., Heb 6:1; 13:7).

Hebrews 6:12 directs readers’ faith toward a spirit of patience and the hope of the inheritance and fulfillment of God’s promises. The letter later presents Noah as an example of such faith. Hebrews 11:7 describes him as one who responded to God’s call even when the problems he was going to face were “as yet unseen.” For his faith, he was made an heir of righteousness. Similarly, Abraham went where God directed without knowing the final destination (Heb 11:8–9).

While praising the patriarchs (and matriarch, Sarah) for their faith, Hebrews adds that they all died without the pleasure of seeing the promises given to them completely fulfilled—only “from a distance they saw and greeted them” (Heb 11:13). Looking deeply at salvation, the author of Hebrews remarks that Moses endured persecution and mockery for the sake of Christ and his eyes were set on a future reward (Heb 11:26).

In identifying the faithful saints of Israel’s past, the author of Hebrews encourages readers to persevere under trials. Hebrews presents life as a race and prompts readers to push forward, anticipating the finish line and prize (Heb 12:1). In Hebrews 13:14 the author writes, “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” He encourages his readers to practice faith that is focused on the future consummation of God’s work of salvation. The author also offers exhortation to promote maturity and love within the community in the present. While he wishes for them to set their hope on the future promises of God, that hope is meant to transform their present lives in deep ways. C. S. Lewis captures this idea well in his chapter on hope in *Mere Christianity*: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134).

James on Faith and Works

The letter of James speaks on the subject of faith in a way that is distinct from Hebrews and Paul’s teachings on the subject. Evoking the sense of covenant faithfulness, James calls believers to practice faith that can hold up under pressure (Jas 1:3) and that does not hesitate or doubt (Jas 1:6). In James 2:14–26, James shifts his discussion to focus on faith and works. He uses much the same language as Paul (e.g., Galatians and Romans), yet James seems to present the opposite perspective. While Paul argues that “a person is justified by faith (πίστις, *pistis*) apart from works (ἔργον, *ergon*) of the law” (Rom 3:28), James states that “a person is justified by works (ἔργον, *ergon*) and not by faith (πίστις, *pistis*) alone” (Jas 2:24). However, while Paul and James’ teachings seem incompatible, a closer examination will demonstrate that their ideas are not contradictory.

First, while both Paul and James use the words faith (πίστις, *pistis*), works (ἔργον, *ergon*), and justified (δικαιόω, *dikaioō*), James doesn’t refer to work as works of the law (i.e., Torah). James’ use of the word “works” in relationship to faith suggests a meaning of “deed,” where deeds are the natural expressions of true faith. With this understanding, James’ teachings are not in opposition to Paul’s teachings regarding Torah-regulations. Rather, their teachings seem to be in alignment.

Additionally, in James’ statement that “faith apart from works is useless” (Jas 2:20 NET), he seems to refer to a superficial or nominal faith. James speaks against a surface-level confession of faith that contradicts the person’s actual lifestyle and habits (ἔργον, *ergon*). Thus, rather than contradicting Paul’s teachings, James seems to be correcting a misunderstanding of Paul’s teachings.

Paul taught that Gentiles did not need to consider themselves bound to the ritual law of Israel in order to be justified by God. Rather, they needed to have genuine faith (πίστις, *pistis*) in Jesus Christ. People may have misinterpreted his teachings as they spread, misunderstanding him as saying that only faith (verbal confession) was necessary, with no works. If this is the

case, James' message would be a vital corrective: not all faith is true faith, as not all faith is covenant faithfulness to Christ (Longenecker, "Faith of Abraham," 203–212).

Jesus teaches something similar in Matt 7:21 when He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." He goes on to say that some might even prophesy, cast out demons, and perform powerful deeds, but obedience to Him and His Father is the true test of faith (Matt 7:22–27).

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