



THE SINNERGISTS PODCAST

Episode 2: What is Faith?

"**Faith**" is one of the most important, but often misunderstood, words in Christianity.

When it comes to biblical interpretation, **words and concepts must be understood according to the definitions they carried in their own time and culture.**

The word "faith"

- The English word "faith" in the New Testament is almost always translated from the Greek word **πιστις (pistis)**, or one of the words from that **word family**.
- The Greek word **πιστις** is basically identical in meaning to the Latin word **fides** (as in *sola fide*, "faith alone.")
- "Faith" may not actually be the best English translation of these words.

What biblical faith is *not**

- It is *not* the opposite of evidence-based truth.
- It is *not* the opposite of "works."
- It is *not* reducible to mental assent, ie., "believing" the right things about God.

"Faith" (πιστις/*fides*) in the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman world**

- Not typically the words used for propositional belief.
- Mostly relational in nature. ie., relationships between husband/wife, family members, masters/slaves, soldiers/commanders, patrons/clients, etc.
- Carries the meaning of devotion, loyalty, faithfulness based on trust.
- Carries the meaning of, and maybe should often be translated as "**allegiance.**"*

Historical Examples

[First-century BC] *King Demetrius to the nation of the Jews, greetings. Since you have kept your agreement with us and have continued your friendship with us, and have not sided with our enemies, we have heard of it and rejoiced. Now continue still to keep faith [πιστις] with us, and we will repay you with good for what you do for us. (1 Maccabees 10: 25– 27 NRSV)*

[First-century AD] Josephus caught a traitor trying to betray him and offered to "forgive him what he had done already, if he would repent of it, and be faithful [πιστος] to me hereafter." (The Life of Flavius Josephus (110).

*Adapted from *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* by Matthew Bates

**Adapted from *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* by Teresa Morgan

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