

Greek Words For Faith

Relevant Greek words

In the Greek New Testament, the word “**faith**” is mostly “**pistis**” and the words “**believe**” or “**believed**” are mostly “**pisteuo**”. Vine states: “*The main elements in faith in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from faith in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun (‘pistis’) and the corresponding verb, ‘pisteuo’; they are (1) a **firm conviction**, producing a full acknowledgement of God’s revelation or truth e.g, 2 Thessalonians 2:11,12. (2) a **personal surrender to Him**, John 1:12; (3) a **conduct inspired by such surrender**, 2 Corinthians 5:7. Prominence is given to one or other of these elements according to the context*”.¹

In his sections on the meanings of the New Testament Greek words for “believe” and “faith” in relation to God in his book “Studies in the vocabulary of the Greek New Testament”, Kenneth Wuest says, “*The New Testament conception of faith includes three main elements, mutually connected and requisite, though according to circumstances **sometimes one** and **sometimes another** may be **more prominent**: (1) a **fully convinced acknowledgement** of the revelation of grace; (2) a **self-surrendering** fellowship (adhesion); and (3) a fully assured and unswerving trust (and with this at the same time hope) in the God of salvation or in Christ. None of these elements is wholly ignored by any of the New Testament writers. Thus, the word “believe” sometimes refers to an acknowledgement that a certain statement is true (Matthew 21:25), and sometimes to a definite **commitment** of one’s soul into the keeping of another (John 5:24)”.² Wuest said also, “*In classical Greek, ‘pisteuo’ meant to believe, trust, trust in, put faith in, rely **upon** a person or thing*”.³*

Bauer defines “pisteuo” as “*believe in something, be convinced of something...faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on **trust** in His power and His nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that He exists and that His revelations or disclosures are true...entrust something to someone...trust oneself to someone*”.⁴ Bauer says “pistis” means “*faith...trust, confidence, faith in the active sense...of belief and trust in the Lord’s help in physical and spiritual distress...that which is believed*”.⁵

Louw and Nida define “pisteuo” as “*believe something to be true and, hence, worthy of being trusted, to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance, to believe in the good news about Jesus Christ and to become a follower*”⁶ and also say in translating the words ‘pisteuo’ and ‘pistis’ “*it would be wrong to select a term which would mean merely ‘reliance’ or ‘dependency’ or even ‘confidence’, for there should also be a significant measure of ‘belief’, since real trust, confidence and reliance can only be placed in someone who is believed to have the qualities attributed to such a person*”.⁷

¹ Vine, page 222.

² Kenneth Wuest, “Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament”, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, page 30.

³ Ibid, page 29.

⁴ Bauer, pages 660-662.

⁵ Ibid, pages 662-664.

⁶ Louw and Nida, pages 370, 376 and 379.

⁷ Ibid, page 377.

Bible Study Question

1. Explain what the following Greek New Testament words mean:
 - a) “pistis”
 - b) “pisteuo”.