

pistis, trust, faith, belief, LeGrand Baker

Mike, I'm not at all sure I am qualified to answer your questions, but I have tried – not so much to answer, but to wonder a lot, ponder a little.

Faith means one of three things: belief, trust, pistis,

Belief is entirely arbitrary, in that it has no necessary or predictable reference to reality. An excellent example is the ancient gods. Mars, Zeus, and Odin were gods in whom people believed. These were wonderful gods. They justified war, blessed one according to one's own wishes, or if the wishes were not fulfilled, then they were being angry and punishing people. But the gods did not exist in reality, only in the belief systems of their adherents' minds. When people stopped believing in them, they did not exist any more. I have a beautiful bronze statue of Mercury on my desk, but it isn't the statue of a god, because there is no place in my belief system for either Zeus or his messenger, so all it is, is a lovely decoration. Here belief is not trust, because there is nothing substantial in which one can trust, it only belief.

However, if one believes in something that is real, or true, or honest, then that belief becomes trust, whether it is a chemistry formula or a way of life, or Christ. All one has to do is read the works, especially the private diaries, of the Puritans who first came to America to know that they loved—truly loved—God. And that God answered their prayers. They didn't understand either what God is, or the true nature of the atonement, but they loved God, they believed, they trusted, and they made covenants which they kept. One cannot discount, or discredit that kind of faith.

There is what George Washington called “the Spirit of Freedom” which taught the Founding Fathers the meaning and importance of freedom. They understood its truth, recognized its source, and were willing to risk their lives and all else for their beliefs. One cannot discount, or discredit that kind of faith either. Both the faith of the Puritans and the faith of the Founding Fathers are still strong in our world. Their kind of faith is still changing the world for the better. Our religious and political freedom survives only because we can exist beneath the umbrella of good people who believe in true political principles and worship a God who teaches honesty, kindness, and generosity.

I didn't mean to suggest that kind of faith is inferior, but it is not, it sustains our world. But in my paper about *pistis* I was not addressing the world, I was writing to friends whom I know to be covenant making, temple worshiping Latter-day Saints. That is also true with what follows. I am not talking about good, honest people who believe in God; I am talking about people who have made eternal covenants, both before and during this life we live now.

Trust in OT

Trust, is like belief, but there is one very big difference. Belief can be trusting in something that is not real. But trust, the way it is used in the scriptures to describe one's relationship with God, is believing in something that is very real. Trust implies covenant, whether a formal covenant or not doesn't matter. For example, a child may trust that his parents will protect him, even though the child is not aware of any formal covenant having been made. The covenant relationship is

implicit, and is very real.

Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2:4.)

Pistis in the NT

In all of the scriptures it is both.

Nephi's story is an excellent example. He is told to kill Laban and go into his house and get the plates. Is that trust or pistis. The answer is "yes"

Paul said "pistis is evidence." It may be a formal token, such as the way one holds one's arm or the fact of immersion at baptism, or it may be what one does. Praying in the name of Christ is a pistis that validates the prayer, but it is also an expression of trust. Obedience to the instructions from the Spirit, is a pistis, but it is also an expression of trust. Here is an example.

Nephi's obedience when he decapitated Laban, put on his clothing, and went after the plates, was Nephi's token of the covenant in that God had just made with him:

"And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher [king and priest] over thy brethren." (1 Nephi 2:22)

For Nephi to be the legitimate king and priest, he needed certain evidences of his authority: the royal Manasseh family genealogy, regalia (sword), clothing, and sacred records. Nephi's following God's instructions about how to get the records and the regalia of kingship and priesthood are a token of Nephi's accepting the responsibilities and the burdens of that covenant. His risking his life to follow God's instructions are a tangible evidence of his trust. To say that Nephi exercised great faith in the Lord at that time, is certainly true. One might also say that he his faith was belief, but in that case belief and trust mean the same thing, for what he believed in was the reality of the covenant, and his belief was the trust that God would protect him. Here belief is trust, because Nephi's God is the very personification of reality personified. Nephi's belief is in something very substantial; his trust is covenant-based. His faith is reality, and is not unsubstantiated belief.

That's the best I can do to answer two of your questions: What does the keyword "exceeding" mean in association with faith? Or "exceedingly strong"?

For your related question, "How can a token be tried?" let's look at two scriptures.

That the trial of your faith [*pistis*], being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (1 Peter 1:7.)

There, Peter uses the word *pistis*, so one doesn't have to wonder if that is his intent. He says the token of one's covenant will be "tried with fire." That is heavy.

Before we examine that verse, it helps to see how Peter uses *pistis* in Second Peter, chapter 1.

Peter knows he is going to die soon, so he leaves these final instructions about how one may make one's calling and election sure. He is writing in his official capacity as President of the Church.

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained [past tense] like precious faith [pistis: tokens of the covenant] with us through the righteousness [zedek = correctness of temple ordinances] of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace [the ultimate blessings of the Spirit, as in 3 Ne. 12: 8-10, and Moroni 7: 2-4, 48] be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness [clearly a reference to ordinances and covenants], through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue [that's God's side of the covenant]:

4 Whereby [through the call] are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises [covenants]: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped conduct corruption that is in the world through lust. [The following is the sequential key to salvation:]

5 And beside this, giving all diligence [keep your end of the covenant], add to your faith [pistis] virtue; and to virtue knowledge; [In the sequence, that is the last thing he says about self-improvement. Every one of the next steps has to do with one's dealings with other people.]

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness [Bible footnote: GR reverence. If one reveres other people, one cannot do them deliberate harm, nor can one be unkind];

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [which is "the pure love of Christ].

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ [unfruitful knowledge is knowledge that does not change attitudes and conduct.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [the things in this sequence], ye shall never fall:

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-11)

If one can assume that Peter is using the word *pistis* the same way in First Peter, then this is what we have:

Again, Peter is writing in his official capacity:

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers [Strong: 3927, residents] scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

[That identifies their geography, now he identifies them as individuals:]

2 Elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father [at the Council], through sanctification of the Spirit [that's what he was talking about in First Peter], unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. [again, the ultimate blessings of the Spirit]

3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again [as in Psalm 2, 3 Ne. 12: 8-10, Moroni 7: 48, and Ephesians 1] unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, [promise of Celestial glory]

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith [*pistis*, the tokens of the covenant that one will be saved] unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations [Bible footnote: GR trials, afflictions]:

7 That the trial of your faith [*pistis*, the tokens of the covenants], being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it [the *pistis*] be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ [Second Comforter]:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing [trust], ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end [object, conclusion] of your faith [*pistis*], even the salvation of your souls.

10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Like Nephi, who was promised all the blessings of sacral kingship and priesthood, the people

whom Peter was writing to, had similar promises, and they would be tried to discover their integrity, just as Nephi was.

The other scripture that will help is Ether 12, where Moroni writes,

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith [the token of the covenant] is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.(Ether 12:6.)

It seems to me, that Moroni is writing about the same thing that Peter wrote about.

(Ether 12:5-41)

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen [token of the covenant is the visible portion of the covenant]; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith [until after you have shown that you will, or are willing to, keep your side of the covenant].

7 For it was by faith [according to the tokens] that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him [specific tokens of specific covenants] ; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world. [It was exclusive to those who had made affirmation kept the covenant]

8 But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen. [same idea as in First Peter]

9 Wherefore, ye may also have hope [live as though the covenants were already fulfilled], and be partakers of the gift [gift of the Spirit], if ye will but have faith [the tokens of the covenant. In context, it sounds like God will give you the affirmation of his tokens].

10 Behold it was by faith [those same tokens] that they of old were called after the holy order of God.

11 Wherefore, by faith [through the tokens of the covenants] was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way; and it is by faith [the tokens of God's covenants] that it hath been fulfilled.

12 For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith. [If men do not keep their covenants, God cannot show himself to them]

13 Behold, it was the faith [*pistis*] of Alma and Amulek that caused the prison to tumble to the earth.

14 Behold, it was the faith [*pistis*] of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites, that they were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

15 Behold, it was the faith [*pistis*] of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites.

16 Yea, and even all they who wrought miracles wrought them by faith [*pistis*], even those who were before Christ and also those who were after.

17 And it was by faith [*pistis*] that the three disciples obtained a promise that they should not taste of death; and they obtained not the promise until after their faith [*pistis*].

18 And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith [*pistis*]; wherefore they first believed [trusted] in the Son of God.

19 And there were many whose faith [trust] was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil [As I consider the story of the Brother of Jared, it seems to me than “faith” here must refer to both his following the conditions of the covenant by bringing the crystals to the mountain, and it is also a reference to his absolute trust that the Lord will keep his promise.], but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.

20 And behold, we have seen in this record that one of these was the brother of Jared; for so great was his faith in God, that when God put forth his finger he could not hide it from the sight of the brother of Jared, because of his word which he had spoken unto him [because of the covenant God had made] , which word [covenant] he had obtained by faith [having trusted enough to kept his former covenants].

21 And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil.

22 And it is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles; therefore the Lord hath commanded me, yea, even Jesus Christ. [It seems to me that what Moroni is saying is that covenants come after other covenants are fulfilled. Thus by keeping previous covenants, the brother of Jared saw God; by keeping previous covenants, the fathers obtained other covenants regarding the perpetuation of their testimonies through the written word.]

23 And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing [One can be mighty in words because the Spirit carries the message, but in writing that one-on-one is not there, unless the Spirit is invited by the reader.]; for thou hast made all this

people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them;

24 And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them. [which, I suppose, is the reason that his book is sealed to all those who do not have the background to understand]

25 Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words.

Moroni has not given us a list of people who had faith, he has presented us with a coherent message that covenants build of covenants, until one can come into the presence of God (One must do that, whether in this life or the next, if one can not come to where God is, one can not live with him forever.) Now, having led us through that discussion, and introduced us to Moroni's dilemma of needing to teach, but not having personal access to those whom he would teach, he tells of a conversation he had with the Saviour that addresses the question he has introduced to us.

26 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

27 And if men come unto me [that's the whole issue] I will show unto them their weakness.

“Weakness” is singular, and it is defined in v. 37— not in terms of what weakness is, but in terms of what is strength: And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. [having charity, and being clean are necessary prerequisites to being “strong.”] And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father. [So being strong is being in the presence of God, therefore, being weak is being out of the presence of God.] I give unto men weakness [literally: I have sent my children from my presence] that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith [the sequence of covenants Moroni has been trying to teach us about] in me, then will I make weak things [that's plural - weak things] become strong unto them.

28 Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness [teach them how to come unto Christ], and I will show unto them that faith [the tokens of the covenants], hope [living as though the covenants were fulfilled already] and charity [being the personification of the love by which all the covenants are fulfilled] bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.

Mike, your last question is the most difficult of all: “If faith is the token of a covenant, how is it that men can have faith before baptism?”

The question you actually ask is simple, “men” - - mature people - - can have faith before baptism if the Spirit has taught them the meaning of the Saviour’s atonement, and they have learned to trust the Spirit. Trust is faith, even if it is only the anticipation of the covenant and its fulfillment.

Your unasked question is the most interesting one: “If faith is the token of a covenant, how is it that children can have faith before baptism?” I don’t know. They are innocent by virtue of their having accepted the atonement before they came into this world. The covenant the Saviour and the child had already made sustains the child until this world’s experiences crowd out his memory of the past. I suspect it is the residue of that innate memory that gives the child a perfect sense (in not a perfect academic understanding) of the meaning and the powers of the Saviour’s love.