**Appendix 2. “Faith” is “Trust”**

**Part One: “Faith” and “Trust”**

**“Trust” is a Better Translation than “Faith”**

The purpose of this appendix is to explain why “trust” is a much better English translation of the Greek word *pistis* than “faith” is, and also to show that “faith” is so misunderstood and misused that in most cases we feel it is no longer a good translation to put in the English Bible. Where the Revised English Version reads “trust,” almost all English versions say “faith.” But “trust” is the better translation. There is a lot of confusion among Christians about faith, so it is important to demystify it and become clear on what it is.

In the New Testament, “faith” is most often translated from the Greek noun *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), which, like many other Greek words, has several meanings, including “trust” (Rom. 3:28; 1 Cor. 15:14); “faithfulness, reliability” (Prov. 12:22 LXX; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 3:3; Gal. 5:22); “oath, troth” (3 Macc. 3:10 LXX); and “proof, pledge” (Acts 17:31). Also, in the New Testament and later Christian writings, *pistis* was used as a designation for the entire scope of religious practices and beliefs of the followers of Jesus, as in “the Christian Faith” (Gal. 1:23). As it was used in the everyday Greek-speaking world, “faithfulness” and “trust” were both very common meaning of *pistis*. However, in the New Testament, *pistis* means “trust” much more than it does “faithfulness,” and when *pistis* is translated “faith” in phrases like “faith in God,” “faith in Christ,” or “have faith,” it means “trust,” “confidence,” or “assurance.”

The early Christians would have readily perceived the meaning of *pistis* as “trust” or “confidence,” and that meaning can be easily confirmed by checking any good biblical lexicon or Bible dictionary. For example, *pistis* has been defined as:

* “With the predominant idea of trust (or confidence)” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*);
* “Firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).
* “Firm persuasion” (*A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* by E.W. Bullinger).
* “State of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted; *trust,* confidence” (*A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, W. Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, 2000; usually abbreviated “BDAG”).
* “It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ...” (*The New Bible Dictionary*).
* “In the New Testament, ‘faith’ is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning ‘trust’ or ‘confidence’ in God” (*Holman Bible Dictionary*).

These few examples could be multiplied manyfold, but the point should be clear: the biblical meaning of *pistis* in phrases like “*pistis* in God” is “trust.”

Hebrews 11:1 also defines what *pistis* is: “Now faith [*pistis*] is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (NIV2011). The NASB uses slightly different vocabulary but gives the same message: “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” So the Bible itself defines *pistis* as assurance or confidence in something, and a good way to express that in English is by the word “trust.”

**“Trust” is a Simple Concept**

“Faith” has been defined and explained so many different ways that it is a difficult concept to grasp. In contrast, “trust” is simple to understand. The lexical sources listed above defined it when they defined *pistis*: it is confidence, a firm persuasion, a conviction based on the reliability, or trustworthiness, of the person or thing that is trusted. Also, trust has to have an object; something that is trusted. The human mind cannot “just trust.” We have to trust something. It can be God, our spouse, our friend, or even that the sun will come up tomorrow, but trust requires an object; we have to trust some trustworthy thing.

Lastly, our trust does not make, or force, anything to happen. We trust the sun will come up, but that does not make it come up. We trust that our so-far-always-reliable car will start when we turn the key, but that does not make it start. We trust our friend will help us in a pinch, but that does not force him to help. We trust God loves us, but that does not make Him help us in any given situation. *Pistis* (trust; faith) is not a force. It does not make things happen.

**Where the Word “Faith” Came From**

It is easy to see why *pistis*, which means “trust” or “confidence,” came to be translated “faith” in our English Bibles. When the New Testament was translated into Latin, the Latin word *fides* (pronounced 'fee-dace), which means “trust,” was often used to translate the Greek word *pistis*. And *fides* was a good translation because just as the Greek word *pistis* meant “trust, confidence,” so did the Latin word *fides*. As the English language developed many centuries later, the Latin word *fides* became the root of the English word “faith” (also “fidelity,” “fiduciary,” etc.). In contrast to the Latin root *fides*, the English word “trust” has Indo-European roots and came into our language via the Old Norse. The English language was built over time from many different word roots, which is a major reason why modern English has so many different words that seem to mean the same thing.

**“Take It by Faith” is Not Biblical**

The statement “take it by faith” has echoed throughout Christianity for centuries, but it never occurs in the Bible and is not a biblical concept. Why not? Because we cannot make ourselves trust something that is untrustworthy or that we do not understand. This concept is not well understood. It is often said, “I don’t understand electricity but I trust it.” That statement is not actually correct. What most people trust about electricity is that it works: the light always comes on when they flip the light switch and they always get shocked if they touch the “hot” wire. That is not “trusting electricity,” it is trusting that electricity reliably does certain things—and they do understand, and thus trust, that part.

Translating *pistis* as “faith” instead of “trust” has obscured the simple truth that we don’t trust what we don’t understand. Most people are not really sure of what “faith” is, so they accept the Church teaching that they can have faith in something they don’t understand. We can “accept” something and not argue about it even if we don’t understand it, but “accepting” something is not “trust.”

Once we realize that *pistis* means “trust,” we can see that the phrase “take it by faith” is equivalent to “just trust me.” When a salesperson says “Just trust me,” we become suspicious and are inclined not to trust them. Similarly, we should think twice when someone is talking about a biblical subject and says to “just take it by faith.” If we are ever told to “take it by faith,” that is a signal that the person teaching us cannot explain the doctrine he or she is teaching, and/or that the doctrine is untrustworthy.

**“Faith” Changed Meaning—Twice!**

We have seen that the biblical meaning of the Greek word *pistis* is “trust,” but that is not its primary meaning “on the street” today. Many Christians, and most non-Christians, think “faith” means “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, 2004). Often that definition has been used to ridicule Christians, and admittedly, “believing in something for which there is no proof” seems like a questionable practice. So how did that non-biblical definition of “faith” develop?

Over the centuries, doctrines were brought into Christianity that were not biblically sound, and some that were not even logical. When those doctrines were questioned, since there was no proper biblical answer, the answer often given by the church authorities was simply, “take it by faith.” Sadly, the history of the Christian Church is replete with examples of wonderful Christians who were pressured or tortured into taking things “by faith” that did not make sense to them. Thus, over time, “faith” changed meanings. It came to mean belief in something for which there is no proof. The average Christian is not enough of a linguist to know that the commonly accepted definition of faith is not the actual biblical definition of the Greek and Latin text, so they wrongly think that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is a biblical definition of “faith.”

In the twentieth century, the meaning of faith changed again for many Christians, although the meaning of “belief in something for which there is no proof” has remained alongside the newer meaning. In what is now called “the Word of Faith Movement,” the word “faith” has come to denote a power or force of the mind that can appropriate things; that can force God or “the universe” to bring things to pass. Although many denominations reject the teaching of the Word of Faith Movement, for millions of Christians, “faith” has come to refer to a power of the mind that can bring material things into one’s life, move mountains, produce healing, bring financial wealth, and more. But biblically, “faith” is not a force or a power of the mind. In the next section, we will examine why many people have come to think that “faith” is a force that can affect the physical world.

**Part Two: Why “Faith” Sometimes Seems to Work**

**Many Different Reasons**

The unbiblical teaching of the Word of Faith Movement is that “faith” is a power or force that can control things. But if that is not what the Bible says, why does “faith” sometimes seem to work? There are many reasons that come together to give the impression that “faith” appropriates things, and these have been used to support the Word of Faith doctrine. They include the manifestation of faith, prayer, grace, humility, the operation of a gift ministry, and even occasional help from demonic sources.

**The Manifestation of Faith**

One of the biggest reasons “faith” sometimes seems to bring things to pass is that “regular faith” (trust) gets confused with the “manifestation of trust.” The “manifestation of trust,” more popularly known as the “manifestation of faith” or even “the gift of faith,” is one of the nine manifestations (sometimes called “gifts”) of the holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-9).

“Regular trust” occurs when there is a trustworthy object to trust. In contrast, the “manifestation of faith” occurs when God or the Lord Jesus Christ gives a specific revelation to a Christian. That revelation is God’s “green light,” and gives the Christian the authority to do what he cannot do by his own human power. If God gives a Christian the revelation to heal a person, then the Christian can operate the manifestations of faith (trust) and healing, and bring about healing. In Acts 3:4-8 Peter got revelation to heal a lame man. Peter commanded the healing, and the man was healed. But Peter was not merely employing regular “faith” (trust), he was operating manifestations of holy spirit: the manifestation of faith (trust) and the manifestation of healing.

The person doing the healing, in that case, Peter, needs revelation from God for the healing to come to pass. The revelation is God’s indication that He will supply the power for the healing. If healing was done by a person’s own human power, then logically, he or she could simply go out and heal everyone. After all, if faith is simply a power that can be operated, and a person had the faith to heal one person, then he should have the power to heal everyone. But this is obviously not the way faith works.

Someone defending the Faith Movement might respond, “But the person being healed needs faith, too.” That is not always true; there are many examples in the Bible and in life where the one healed did not have faith. Dead people have been raised, babies have been healed, and people have been healed who were unbelievers or who did not expect it. So the question remains: why can a person with faith heal some people and not others? The answer is simple: faith is not a force that accomplishes tasks. God is the force; He is the power. The reason we need “faith” (“trust”) is so that when God gives us the revelation to do a miracle or healing, we trust that He will do it. No matter how impossible something seems, if God gives you the revelation to do something, if you trust Him, you can. That is the “manifestation of trust” (1 Cor. 12:9).

Confusing “regular faith” (“trust”) with the “manifestation of faith” (trust) misleads people into thinking that the great miracles and healings in the Bible were done simply because the person who did them had great “faith.” Actually, the miracles and healings in the Bible were done by the manifestation of faith and God exerting His power. “Faith” is “trust,” and when God makes a promise, we trust it, but it is God who brings His promise to pass; not our trust. We understand this perfectly in the physical world, and it works the same way in the spiritual world.

Let’s say you have a friend whose car is being fixed, so you offer to give him a ride to work. He trusts you will actually show up and give him the ride, so he accepts. Then, because you are trustworthy, you keep your promise and give him the ride. But did his trust in you somehow force you give him the ride? Of course not. His trust gave him the confidence to be ready to be picked up at an appointed time, but it was your power that supplied the ride. Furthermore, you did not have to offer him the ride in the first place even though he was a trusting friend. At no point did the fact that he trusted you force you to act on his behalf.

Biblical trust works the same way. We trust that God can heal, but that does not force Him to heal. Furthermore, our trust does not give us the power to heal without God. The fact that our trust in God does not “make” things happen explains why “faith” seems to fail so often. However, when God does tell us to heal—by giving us the revelation to do it—then we can trust His “Yes” and command a healing.

[For more information on the manifestation of faith, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9.]

**God Answers Prayers**

Another reason why “faith” sometimes seems to appropriate things in the material world is because answered prayer gets confused with the “power of faith.” The Bible tells us that God answers prayer and that we are to pray for the things we need or desire. Sometimes when people are trying to have “faith” for something, they ask God for it over and over; but praying over and over for something is one of the things God tells us to do to get our prayers answered (Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). So sometimes if someone gets what he has been consistently praying for, it is due to God answering his prayer, not because his human mind and “faith” somehow brought what he wanted to him.

God answering prayers also helps to explain why “faith” seems to fail so often, or takes so long to work. If we really were getting what we wanted due to the power of our faith, then we should be able to get anything that is available, and get it quickly. After all, if we have the faith to get one thing we want, then our faith should build and we should have even more faith to get more things we want. But people’s experience is that they do not always get what they “have faith for,” and often when they do get what they want, it takes a long time. This is consistent with what the Bible says about God answering prayers.

God often answers prayers, especially those prayed fervently over a period of time, but there are also lots of reasons people do not get what they pray for, including asking with the wrong motives (James 4:3), the spiritual battle (Dan. 10:10-13), the fallen nature of the world (Heb. 9:27), and other realities and laws God has to honor, such as the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7). But the point is that sometimes when people get what they want it is due to their prayers and God’s decision to answer them, not to their “faith.”

**Grace and Humility**

Sometimes receiving what we want is simply God giving us grace. God is God, and He has plans and purposes that He will accomplish. Additionally, in our personal lives, sometimes receiving God’s grace is due to our humility. The Bible is clear that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). There are clearly occasions when believers get what they need or want from God simply because He loves them and gives them grace. A good example is John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, getting pregnant. She had wanted to get pregnant for years without success, but because of God’s purposes and plans He gave her grace and she was able to get pregnant (Luke 1:5-25). It is because these occasions are due to God’s grace and His plans that they are not repeatable at our will. That people do not repeatedly get what they want even when they are trying hard to have “faith,” is good evidence that it is not our “faith” that brings us things, but sometimes is simply due to God’s love and grace.

**Having a Positive Attitude**

Another reason that “faith” may appear to work at times is that people are taught that if they have faith, they are to act and speak in a positive and confident manner, as if they have already received what they were having “faith” for. But psychological studies show that people who are happy and have a positive attitude almost always do better in life than those who don’t. Happy, positive people are more successful than sad, doubtful, disillusioned people. One reason is that they typically work harder and are more productive.

But the fact that people who are positive thinkers are generally more successful than those who see the world in a negative light does not make “faith” into a force or law. Plenty of positive people do not have what they would like to have. In fact, some of the happiest and most trusting people on earth are very disadvantaged mentally, physically, and/or materially.

Also, having a happy, positive outlook on life is extremely effective when it comes to our physical health. A person’s mind cannot generate a faith-force that appropriates things outside his body, but the Bible is clear that the way a person thinks powerfully affects his own body (Prov. 3:7, 8; 4:20-22; 12:4; 14:30; 15:13; 16:24; 17:22; 18:14). If we trust in God, think positive thoughts, and maintain a godly environment, we will be much healthier than if we do not. So it is that many times when sick people are healed, it is due to them getting rest, having loving people care for them, getting away from the worries and bustle of life, and taking time to think, pray, and perhaps read the Bible or inspiring literature. The Bible says, “A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine” (Prov. 17:22), and many times when people are healed it is due to their being relaxed and “merry,” not due to their “faith.”

**God Honors the Gift Ministries**

Another reason “faith” seems to work for some people is that God honors the gift ministries He has given. If a person has a gift ministry in an area, then success in that area tends to come as well. Thus, if a person has a ministry in miracles or healing, he may have great success in that area, but may wrongly attribute that success to his personal faith rather than God honoring the special gift He has given him. The Bible tells us that God gives some individuals the ministry of healing, miracles, giving, and more (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28).

There are times when Christian healers start ministering without consciously receiving revelation, and either the revelation comes during the ministering, or the person is healed anyway, seemingly without revelation. Those cases are quite common and are due to things such as we just discussed, including prayer, humility, grace, and God honoring a gift ministry.

**Satan’s Deceitful Help**

An important reason why people believe there is a law that allows them to control things and bring success to themselves is that the Devil wants people to think they can control their lives and destiny without God. Sometimes when “faith,” or mental power, seems to work in helping people get what they want, it is because the Devil maneuvers situations and circumstances to make it seem like people are receiving things they have “faith” for. The Devil is constantly seeking to lead people away from God and truth, so he will sometimes help people acquire material things if it accomplishes his greater goal.

A good explanation of how the Devil helps people was written many decades ago in the book, *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill. Hill is still considered a guru of financial self-help, and in his book, as the title suggests, he gives principles of the mind that supposedly allow people to acquire wealth. However, by the end of the book, he reveals the real secret to his success: getting help from a demon. Of course, Hill does not come out and say his helper is a demon, and he might not have fully understood it himself, although he did know he was getting outside help from the spirit realm and not just from the power of his mind.

Hill calls his helper a “guardian angel,” but the fact that he calls it an angel does not make it one; the Bible tells us that “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14 HCSB). In the second-to-last chapter of *Think and Grow Rich*, Hill writes:

This much the author [Napoleon Hill] does know—there is a power, or a First Cause, or an Intelligence, which permeates every atom of matter, and embraces every unit of energy perceptible to man…This Intelligence may, through the principles of this philosophy, be induced to aid in transmuting DESIRES into concrete, or material, form. The author has this knowledge, because he has experimented with it—and has EXPERIENCED IT. …There comes to your aid, and to do your bidding, with the development of the sixth sense, a “guardian angel” who will open to you at all times the door to the Temple of Wisdom.” [Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich*; eBook, 1937 edition, Chapter 14, “The Sixth Sense: The Door to the Temple of Wisdom” (emphasis original). See also, *Outwitting the Devil*, p. 48, 49].

By the end of his book it is clear that Hill is saying that if you get to the point that your focus in life is on material things, then a “guardian angel” will come into your life, do your bidding, and help you get what you want. That worked for Napoleon Hill, and he and many others say it can work for anyone. Actually, although in 1937 Hill used the term “guardian angel” for his spiritual helper, in 1938 he wrote the book, *Outwitting the Devil*, in which he described meeting the Devil himself. Although some people have tried to say that Hill only used the Devil as a literary device, that is not what Hill himself says:

I have had experience with enough of the principles mentioned by the Devil to assure me that they will do exactly what he says they will. That is enough for me. …I believe the Devil is exactly who he claims to be. (*Outwitting the Devil: The Secret to Freedom and Success*; Sterling, New York, 1938, printed and annotated 2011; p. 56).

For centuries there has been a kind of folk belief—usually made fun of—that you can “sell your soul to the Devil” to get what you want in this life. As with most long-standing beliefs, there is some truth in it. The Devil is willing to help people acquire material success, especially since he can do it in a way that excludes God. One reason for this is that people who focus on material success usually do not turn to God for help or salvation, and so they will perish in the Lake of Fire along with the Devil instead of living forever with Jesus. Even if the person is a Christian when he starts his “success by faith” journey, he is taught that “his faith” is his source of supply, not God, and so finding the will of God becomes less important than figuring out how to build his faith and gain success in life.

Not everyone who gets help from the Devil recognizes the true source of the help—even Napoleon Hill apparently did not for a while. But just because someone does not realize he is getting help from demonic sources does not mean he is not, especially if he is directly opposing God in asking for that help, such as making wealth or power a dominant motive in his life. One way we can tell that Hill was not getting help from God is his confident assertion based on his experience that the “guardian angel” comes “to do your bidding.” Anyone who has a personal relationship with the Lord knows that “doing our bidding” is not what God and Jesus are about. We are to do their bidding.

**Is There Really a “Law?”**

That the Devil sometimes helps people gain worldly success explains why there are non-Christian groups that believe that the power of the mind taps into a “law” that works for both believers and unbelievers. In fact, when the “law” of faith is examined, there is really not much difference between what Word of Faith teachers say about the power of “faith,” and what non-believers say about the power of the mind.

The book, *The Secret*, by Rhonda Byrne, which came out in 2006 and received great publicity, speaks of the “Secret” being the “law of attraction” (p. 25). Byrne, who says the “law of attraction” works for anybody, writes: “The Secret gives you anything you want; happiness, health, and wealth” (p. 1). “If you can think about what you want in your mind, and make that your dominant thought, you will bring it into your life” (p. 9). “Nothing can come into your life unless you summon it through persistent thoughts” (p. 43). “The law of attraction is a law of nature. It is as impartial as the law of gravity” (p. 43).

Byrne and others who believe in the power of the mind do not include God in their teaching, but still say the principles they operate are in the New Testament. Byrne writes: “The Creative Process used in The Secret, which was taken from the New Testament in the Bible, is an easy guideline for you to create what you want in three simple steps” (*The Secret*, p. 47). The steps she then outlines are: ask, believe, and receive.

So in the final analysis, Word of Faith Christian ministers and power of the mind unbelievers both believe in a law based on the power of the mind that gets people what they want. Sometimes this law seems to work, often it does not. However, when it seems to work, it does not mean that there really is such a “law” or that the mind is somehow affecting the physical world. If people get what they want, it is often due to things like prayer or grace, or in some cases may even be due to help from the Adversary.

**Part Three: Errors with the Faith Movement**

**It’s Not About You**

One of the problems with the doctrine of the Word of Faith Movement and non-Christian groups that teach about the power of the mind is that it puts the emphasis on the individual—*you*. Since most of these groups teach that it is a “law” that if you have faith, you can bring into your life whatever you want, it is clear that the pressure is on “you.” Kenneth Hagin, a Word of Faith minister, writes: “That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God: Have faith in your faith” (*Having Faith in Your Faith*, p. 5). Hagin says Jesus appeared to him in a vision and told him: “If anybody, anywhere, will…put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father” (eBook: *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God,* Chapter 1).

E. W. Kenyon, one of the founders of the Faith Movement, wrote in his book, *The Two Kinds of Faith*, “Faith in your own faith is the law of success in the realm of the spirit” (p. 36). Kenneth Copeland wrote, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. …Faith is a spiritual force” (*The Force of Faith* p. 13). Victor Paul Wierwille called this “law” the “law of believing,” and wrote: “The law of believing is the greatest law in the Word of God. As a matter of fact, is it not only the greatest law in The Word, it is the greatest law in the whole world. Believing works for saint and sinner alike” (*Power for Abundant Living*, 1971, p. 32). So if this “law” is not working in your life, then Word of Faith ministers say that the problem is “you.”

We need to become clear that “having faith in your faith” is nothing more than having faith in yourself. But that is not what Jesus said to do to accomplish God’s will in your life. In Mark 11, Jesus cursed a fig tree that died overnight. When the apostles pointed the dead tree out to Jesus, he said to them: “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22 NIV84; “Have trust in God” REV). If we want to do miracles like Jesus did, we have to do what Jesus said to do: trust God. When we look in the Bible, people who wanted miracles trusted God and His Son, Jesus. The centurion whose servant was healed trusted Jesus (Matt. 8:8-11). So did the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Matt. 9:21); the Synagogue ruler whose daughter was raised from the dead (Matt. 9:18); the blind men who were healed (Matt. 9:28); and Peter when he walked on water (Matt. 14:28-30).

But if the people in the Bible who accomplished and/or received great miracles trusted God, why did Jesus say to the woman healed of bleeding, “Your faith has healed you?” (Mark 5:34 NIV84). He said it because although it was God’s will to heal the woman and He supplied the power for the healing, the woman still had to trust that God would heal her. The woman’s faith was a reason she was healed; not the ultimate reason, but an important one. The woman’s faith (trust) in God did not force God to heal her, but in that situation, God made healing available to her, and she had to then trust God to receive it. Certainly, God can act without people trusting Him; Lazarus was dead but was healed and given life. But in many cases, God has chosen to work in concert with His people. He gives the “green light,” the revelation to act; then we trust and act; then God supplies the power and does what He said He would do. Our faith does not make things happen, but it is an important part of the process that God has set up so that things do happen.

Word of Faith ministers teach that you can make things happen in the physical world by your faith, so it is common to hear them use the phrase “have faith for” (or “believe for”). Many Christians are surprised to learn that no phrase like “have faith for” occurs in the Bible. The reason is simple: we don’t have the power to make things happen. God has the power. That is why the phrase that is in the Bible is “pray for.” We can’t “believe for” things and make them happen, but we can “pray for” things and let God make them happen.

The Bible instructs us to “believe in,” but not to “believe for.” The Bible says that we are to “believe in” God, Jesus, and the Gospel, but to “believe in” something is simply to have a firm conviction about it. But that’s the point. If we have a firm conviction about God (we believe in Him and trust Him), then we ask Him for things in prayer. However, we don’t have the power to get what we want on our own: we need Him to accomplish what we are praying for. That takes the pressure off of “us” to “believe for” what we want, and allows God, whom we “believe in,” to graciously answer our prayers.

**Stealing God’s Glory**

The flip side of making material success about “faith” and “you” is that it takes the glory away from the One who really deserves it: God. If our success is really due to us tapping into a “law” that works for believers and unbelievers, then God is almost irrelevant (unbelievers would say He is definitely irrelevant). God is squeezed out of the picture. His plans and purposes for us don’t really matter that much. God (or some Power) becomes a convenient vending machine who is at the beck and call of anyone who has faith, whether he is a saint or sinner. In general, ministers in the Word of Faith Movement get around that argument by saying God wants everyone healthy, wealthy, and happy, and those things are ours for the taking if we have faith. While we agree that it is a general principle that God wants people healthy and blessed, it is also true that there are important reasons that not all of God’s people have those things now.

We are not in a position to understand the specific reasons for what happens on earth—for example, why one person is healed and another is not. The reasons are complex and involve the broken nature of the fallen world we live in; the spiritual battle that is raging between Good and Evil; a person’s individual situation and circumstances; and other factors as well. What happens in our individual lives is an intricate interplay between our will, the will of the Adversary, and the will of God. But we know that God loves us and has a plan to defeat evil and completely redeem His people, and He occasionally energizes miracles and healings that work to accomplish that plan.

The so-called “law” of faith is not a law at all, it is a false teaching. It is praiseworthy to trust God, but it should not be those who trust Him who get the glory, it should be God, because He is the One who is trustworthy. God knows when, where, and how to help, and He supplies the power that does the miracles and healings. The Hero is God, not us.

**Lack of Peace**

As we have seen, one of the consequences of believing that a person’s faith determines what happens to him is that it puts the pressure on the individual. That pressure tends to make people unpeaceful. One of the great blessings of the Bible is that we can trust God and rest in Him, and therefore have peace of mind (Ps. 119:165; John 14:27; Phil. 4:7-9; 2 Thess. 3:16). But people who feel their faith is responsible for what happens to them tend to spend a lot of time focusing on how much faith they have and what they can do to build more faith in order to get more of what they want. Despite the teaching of Word of Faith ministers, focusing on “faith” does not actually build more faith (trust); in fact, it can build more doubt because it fails so often. Once we realize there is no law of faith but that “faith” is trust, we can refocus our lives and spend time dwelling upon God’s goodness and willingness to help us, which is what helps our trust in God to increase.

**Unscriptural Expectations**

A big problem with the “faith brings success” claim, also known as “prosperity theology” or the “Prosperity Gospel,” is that it gives sincere but inexperienced Christians an unscriptural and unrealistic expectation about the Christian life and God’s will for them. The “faith brings success” teaching encourages people to have ungodly desires for material things, including money and power, and this can be very harmful. Admittedly, the “Faith Movement” theology fits well with the modern, self-centered, “what’s-in-it-for-me,” “I want it now” culture, and thus brings some people to Christ who otherwise might not come. However, at some point, all of those people will find out that “faith” does not solve their problems, and then the reason they embraced Christ in the first place is no longer there.

People who believe their faith will bring them success in life eventually encounter circumstances that cause them to doubt their faith. They may get a sickness that does not easily heal; they may be afflicted by a natural disaster such as a tornado, flood, or drought; they may lose their job or have a huge financial loss, etc. Life is full of setbacks and tragedies that are not fixed by “faith,” and people who cannot fix the setbacks in their lives by “faith” will eventually begin to doubt themselves. They lose their “faith in their faith,” and sadly, if they continue to hold to the “faith brings success” ideology, they become confused and feel helpless and hopeless. Some of those people mature into simply accepting that they can only seem to solve a few of their problems by faith, although they don’t understand why it is only a few and not all. But unfortunately, other people abandon Christianity, feel betrayed, and become hurt and bitter about their Christian experience. Those people who become so disillusioned that they stop walking with or believing in Christ are badly hurt in other ways; for example, because they have given up the Christian life, they may lose rewards in the Messianic Kingdom.

[For more on rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

[For a biblical and historical examination of the modern Faith Movement, see, D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel.*]

**Misunderstanding the Scriptures**

There are many scriptures that Word of Faith ministers and Christians who subscribe to the teaching of “believe and receive” use to support their teaching. However, they wrongly understand and apply those scriptures. This does two things at once: it obscures the true meaning of the verses themselves, and also, people are led astray into false teaching based on the false interpretations of the verses.

A typical verse that is used to support the Word of Faith position is Mark 11:23, which says that if you tell a mountain to move, and do not doubt in your heart, it will move. That is true, but the context and scope of Scripture show us that it is the manifestation of faith that moves mountains, not regular “faith.” Although no one moved a mountain in Scripture, great miracles like splitting oceans, stopping rivers, and causing great city walls to fall down did happen—but all by the manifestation of faith.

There are many verses that tell us it is God’s desire for us to be successful and healthy. The Bible says, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health” (3 John 1:2 KJV). Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10 KJV). God does want us healthy, successful, and blessed. But that does not mean we acquire those things “by faith.” There are many biblical keys and principles, including trusting God and living wisely, that work together so that believers can be healthy and successful. For example, Proverbs tells us that some great keys for being successful are saving money over time instead of spending all you make, working hard, and not making risky business deals (cf. Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4; 11:15; 12:27; 13:4; 19:15; 21:17). Similarly, staying healthy involves obeying God, being cheerful, and controlling our feelings and emotions (Prov. 3:8; 14:30; 17:22). Every verse that Word of Faith ministers interpret in a way that supports the “law of faith” has other interpretations that do not endorse that doctrine.

It is God’s desire that His people be blessed and seek His wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Ps. 115:13). His wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs. If we listen to Wisdom, we are blessed, but if we do not, we will be in trouble and may end up “eating the fruit of our way.”

**Proverbs 1:20-33 (NIV84 Abridged by author)**

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, ‘How long will fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you, But since you rejected me when I called and since you ignored all my advice, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways. For the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease.’

In this section of Scripture, Wisdom is highlighting the principle of reaping and sowing, and pointing out that if a person sows foolishly throughout his life, when distress and trouble come, God may not simply undo the results of years of unwise decisions.

The “faith brings success” teaching has caused many Christians to miss the true message of Scripture: life is difficult, even for believers, and “faith” is not meant to change your circumstances but rather to help you persevere through them. This truth is supported by the examples of godly believers in both the Bible and history who experienced terrible difficulties. Could it really be true that the prophets and apostles—the most notable believers in the Bible—could have had such little faith that they seemed to face nothing but problems? This alone should tell us that the message of the Word of Faith Movement is false. The true doctrine is that life is difficult and we need to trust God and stay faithful to Him and He will give us strength to endure.

**Does “Faith” Bring Financial Success?**

It is a standard teaching of the Word of Faith ministers that faith brings financial success, but verses such as James 2:5 directly contradict that teaching. James 2:5 (NASB) says, “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom…?” What James says, we can see for ourselves if we take a look at Christians around the world: there are many who are very materially poor but are rich in faith. It is not hard to find people like that, but if the Word of Faith message is true, Christians who are “rich in faith” should also be rich in the world. Those Christians who are rich in faith but poor by the world’s standards should not condemn themselves for being poor, but rather commend themselves for trusting in God’s promises even though their life is difficult. They will be rewarded.

**Compassion and the Faith Movement**

Another hurtful consequence of believing that what happens in life is based on a person’s faith is that it discourages having genuine compassion toward others who are experiencing problems. The Bible commands us to have compassion for others, but it can be hard to be compassionate when we think people are causing their own troubles. We see this in the book of Job: Job’s “friends” could not console him because they thought his problems were his own fault. Their misguided appeals to Job to repent of the sin that he had supposedly committed hurt them by damaging their friendship with Job, and hurt Job by compounding his grief. Similarly, when those in the Word of Faith Movement try to help someone who has suffered a tragedy by telling them to have more faith, it can hurt the friendship and cause frustration and despair in the person who is already suffering. The Bible says that “no temptation has taken hold of you that is not common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13 REV). When we understand that “faith” is “trust,” and that what happens to us in life is not always our fault, then it becomes easier to have compassion for others who are having problems.

**Is “Trust” an Inappropriate Translation?**

In the Word of Faith Movement, the wrong doctrine about “faith” has obscured the right doctrine about “trust.” The teaching of the Word of Faith Movement has infiltrated so much of Christian thinking that, for many Christians, “trust” is not a good translation of *pistis*. Many Christians think: “Faith is much bigger than trust.” But that’s a serious problem. *Pistis* is not “bigger than trust;” *pistis* is “trust.” No ancient Greek speaker would have thought *pistis* referred to a power or force of the mind, and they would not have thought that their own mind could tap into a spiritual “law” such that they could just have *pistis* and then the universe would have to respond to them. But to people who buy into the modern teaching on the great power of faith, the translation “trust” seems pretty anemic and impotent.

The reality is, however, that on our own we humans are quite impotent. We are mortal and weak. Without God, we would have no hope. But God stepped into our lives and helped us. He sent His Son to die for us so we could live forever and He even sometimes gives us revelation according to His purposes so we can bring His power to bear on earth and perform healings and miracles. And what’s our part in all this greatness? We trust Him. “Trust” is an honest and accurate translation of *pistis*. It magnifies God and it clarifies the part that we play in God’s plan.

**The Plans and Purposes of God**

A terrible consequence of the Word of Faith teaching is that the plans and purposes of God lose their great importance. God’s plans and purposes are the most important reason for the great miracles and healings we see in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, we see many great miracles: Moses splitting the Sea, Joshua making the walls of Jericho fall, Elijah calling fire down from heaven, Shadrach and his two companions staying alive in a furnace of fire, Daniel being delivered from the lion’s den, and many more. Faith ministers say these miracles were done by “faith,” but is that true? Some of them were done by the manifestation of faith, which is dependent on specific revelation from God, which further depends on His plans and purposes. But also, some of the miracles were just God acting in power to fulfill His purposes without any human interaction. Shadrach and his companions staying alive in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace seems to be one of those cases. According to what they said in Daniel 3:18, they were not sure God would rescue them.

The miracles and healings in the Bible are all part of God’s grand plan, and that explains why “regular faith” (trust) can’t reliably bring them to pass at our discretion or repeat them whenever we desire. If Joshua knocked the walls of Jericho down by his faith (Josh. 6:1-21), why didn’t he conquer all the cities in Canaan the same way? If Samuel could make it rain during the dry season in Israel (1 Sam. 12:17), why couldn’t other great believers, like Abraham and David, make it rain during famines? If Elisha could feed many prophets by multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44), why could he not do the same thing when there was a famine in Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-7:20)? If Peter could raise Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-42), why couldn’t he raise others, such as Stephen? Those great miracles were done by the manifestation of faith and were according to God’s purposes and plans.

That God energizes miracles and healings according to His plans and purposes explains Jesus’ healings and miracles. God knew certain Messianic prophecies and foreshadowings had to be fulfilled. Thus, in some cases, like the time Jesus fed the 5,000, He also energized healing for everyone who needed healing (Matt. 14:14; Luke 9:11). But there were other times when Jesus healed only one person. For example, at the Pool of Bethesda there was a crowd of sick people, but Jesus only healed one man (John 5:1-9). It is unreasonable to think that at the feeding of the 5,000, every single person in that huge crowd had faith for healing, but at Bethesda, a pool where people went to be healed, only one person had faith. Like the other great miracles in the Bible, the miracles Jesus did were according to the purposes of God, and God gave the revelation for them to be done. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19).

It is because God works healings and miracles in a way that fits His plans and glorifies Him that there is no “formula” for healing or miracles. Christians who pray for miracles and healings are well aware of the fact that there is no formula for success. The factors that are involved in a healing or miracle vary from case to case. We certainly see this in the life of Jesus. Sometimes Jesus just spoke and a miracle or healing happened. Sometimes he used something physical, like putting mud in a blind man’s eye. Sometimes he healed in front of a crowd, while at other times he took the person aside alone. Sometimes he asked if the person believed in him, sometimes he didn’t.

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, it has been God’s plan and purpose to rescue mankind from sin and death. To do that, many things had to be accomplished, such as the Exodus from Egypt; the conquest of Canaan; the establishment of the kingdom of Israel; the return from Babylon; and the birth, death, and resurrection of the Christ. In order to accomplish His great purposes, God had to energize many specific miracles and healings. God chose to work many of those miracles in concert with people who operated the manifestation of faith, but it was because of God’s plans and purposes that He gave the revelation to do the miracles in the first place; they did not happen just because someone had “faith.” If, when we read the Bible, we look for how a miracle or healing fits into the plan of God, we will see the glory of God in a way we may never have seen it before.

**“But I Want It To Work!”**

Another consequence of the Word of Faith/Power of the Mind teaching is that it allows people to avoid engaging in the true situation in which we all live: that we are not ultimately in control of our lives. The Bible speaks of this in many different verses, and it is confirmed by experience. People face unexpected tragedy on a daily basis. But it is so important for some people to think that they are in control, or that they can have what they want in life, that they willingly ignore the plain evidence of the world around them and push forward with their beliefs. Thus, it is the case that millions of people follow the teachings of the Word of Faith Movement even though they do not reliably work and the people do not have what they “believe for.”

The standard response of the Word of Faith ministers to this problem is to say, “Well, those people didn’t have faith.” But is the massive failure of the Word of Faith message that easy to explain? We say, “No.” The real reason that the teaching of the Word of Faith movement seems to fail so often is because it is a false teaching.

**Part Four: Trusting and Pleasing God**

**Trusting God is Important**

Hebrews 11:6 is a hugely important verse: “And without faith it is impossible to please God…” (NIV84). The REV says, “And without trust it is impossible to please *him*….” Why is it impossible to please God if we don’t trust Him? God created us, loves us, and wants the best for us. If we doubt that, we will doubt Him and not act on His commands or live the life He desires for us. We see this occurring every day in the lives of Christians who believe in God but who do not trust Him enough to overcome the fear or hesitation they have concerning His commands, and who consequently stop short of obeying Him. For example, when it comes to prayer, many Christians know God commands us to pray, but they don’t pray. They don’t trust God enough to obey Him rather than their feelings. Although this can be due to negligence or selfishness, it is often a trust issue.

If we do not trust God, we will doubt salvation through Jesus Christ, and we will not be able to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as He commands us to. It is not strange that God is not pleased with those who don’t trust Him. After all, He has proven Himself to be trustworthy. We should understand God’s point of view. He created us in His image, and we are not happy when people do not trust us—similarly, He is not happy when people don’t trust Him.

**Belief in God is Not Trust in God**

It is possible to believe in God without trusting Him. James 2:19 (REV) shows the difference: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. The demons also believe—and shudder.” Demons know God exists, but they don’t trust Him. That can happen to Christians too, so we should do what it takes so that our belief in God becomes trust in God. Trust develops because we come to believe the person is trustworthy and are convinced that they are reliable. This almost always comes from having a personal relationship.

There is nothing magical about trust. Trust is built over time. Personal relationships can start with a certain level of trust, but eventually, the trust will have to grow from more and more personal interactions or understanding. Every relationship comes to the point where further trust is built by personal experience. God knows that we need to trust Him to please Him, and thus, He does things that help build our trust in Him. God acts to draw us near to Him. He is trustworthy and faithful in all His ways, and as we study His Word and obey it, and enter into a personal relationship with Him, our trust in Him naturally grows.

**Trust is Easily Destroyed**

Although trust is typically built slowly over time, it can be destroyed very quickly. Someone can lie to us or hurt us in some way, or even just be unreliable or do things that do not make sense to us, and our trust in them is weakened or destroyed. That is why in most ancient religions the people were not required to trust their gods. For example, the Greek and Roman gods were not trustworthy and did not demand that people trust them; they were deceitful, jealous, unpredictable, cruel, and even rapists and murderers. They were powerful and lived by the rule of “might makes right,” so they demanded worship—including cruel things like human sacrifice—and if they did not get it, they sought vengeance against those who spurned them.

The God of the Bible is totally different from the gods of other religions. One of His great attributes is that He is trustworthy, so there are many verses that tell us to trust God. Psalm 4:5 (KJV) says, “Put your trust in the LORD.” Furthermore, since God is trustworthy, He keeps His promises. In fact, our God is unique among other gods because He makes specific promises and then is faithful to keep them.

**Satan’s Attack on Trusting God**

Satan knows how important it is that believers trust God and how harmful it is when they do not. God is a “team player” and desires for us to partner with Him in laboring for His kingdom. He has decided to do much of what He accomplishes on earth by working with people who trust Him. Satan knows that, so he uses many different strategies and wages a continual war to make God seem untrustworthy. Satan knows that if he can get a person to think God is untrustworthy, then the battle is won. If a person believes God is evil or unreliable, then he will not trust God.

God is loving and good, and any so-called doctrine that makes Him seem otherwise is misrepresenting the biblical depiction of the Almighty God and should be closely examined.

[For more on Satan’s influence in the world today, see commentary on 1 John 5:19. For more on how mistranslated verses can paint God in a bad light, see commentary on Rom. 8:28. For more on God not causing sickness, death, and disasters on earth, see *Don’t Blame God*, published by Spirit & Truth Fellowship.]

**Pleasing God is the Goal**

Material success should not be the goal of our lives—finding the will of God for our lives must be of supreme importance. One of the reasons it is vital that Christians learn the Bible well is that we have to be careful what we ask for. If we set our hearts on getting things that are against the will of God for us, we may end up in frustration and doubt, or sometimes a demon will bring us what God will not, but it will bring lots of other consequences and baggage as well.

God wants us to have our needs met, but that is different from having wealth and power. God knows if we persistently ask wrongly it can leave us disillusioned or even allow a demon into our lives, so He warns us over and over against setting our hearts on material things.

* **Prov. 23:4 (NIV84)**: “Do not wear yourself out to become rich; be wise enough to restrain yourself.”
* **Prov. 28:20 (NIV84)**: “A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.”
* **Luke 12:15 (REV)**: “…be on guard against every *form of* greediness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.”
* **1 Tim. 6:8-10 (REV)**: “…if we have food and covering, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, which some, reaching out for *it*, have been led astray from the Faith and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
* **Heb. 13:5 (REV)**: “Keep your life free from the love of money, *and* be content with what you have.”

Certainly there will be wealthy Christians, just as Abraham, Joseph, David, and Solomon were wealthy. God has no problem with wealth. In fact, God helps some people get wealth just so they can help others (Rom. 12:8). But God does have a problem with people who ignore the real plan of God for their lives and instead set their heart on material things. God promises to give crown rewards in the future, and He specifically mentions five in His Word. There is the incorruptible crown for exercising self-control and doing our best for God (1 Cor. 9:25 KJV). The crown of rejoicing is for winning others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19 KJV). The crown of righteousness is to those who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8 KJV). God will give the crown of life to those who endure under trial (James 1:12). Lastly, the crown of glory is for those who faithfully shepherd His flock (1 Pet. 5:4 KJV). Sometimes the people who engage in these activities will be wealthy, but often focusing on the call of God in your life means you will not gain great wealth. But standing in the Everlasting Future with a gold crown on your head will far surpass the value of any earthly wealth. We should never labor to be wealthy, we labor to live wisely and do the will of God.

**Conclusion**

As stated at the beginning of this appendix, *pistis* is a common Greek word and in phrases such as “*pistis* in Christ,” it means “trust.” The word “faith” has been so misused in the Church and in culture that it may take some time for our minds to adjust to the idea that a proper translation of *pistis* is “trust,” but we will understand the Bible much better when we think in terms of “trust,” not “faith.” When we properly understand that our part is to trust God, not to “make” things happen by our “faith,” many good things happen.

* God becomes our Hero because He is the One who makes things happen—not us.
* We become more peaceful because we are not worried about how much “faith” we have or getting more faith to get more of what we want.
* We focus on our personal relationship with God because trust builds as the relationship deepens (and an unexpected blessing: we find that when we really focus on God, we become so enthralled with Him in our daily interaction with Him that we have no time or desire to “focus” on trust).
* We pray more because God says to “pray for” what we need and want.
* We become more thankful for the miracles and healings we do see instead of defeated about the ones we don’t see, because we know they are due to God’s love and grace.
* We accept, and strive to endure through, our trials and tribulations, knowing that God, who does not lie, said we would have troubles in this fallen world.
* We hold the Hope of the Next Life more brightly in our hearts because we know that it will be much better than this life.

God is trustworthy, so we trust Him. Our trust does nothing in and of itself; the power to do mighty things comes from God. God keeps His promises and does what He says He will do. He is the Hero.