Pistis

A. The 1st is the feminine singular noun piteos (πίστεως), which is from pistis (πίστις), which has the following cognates:

1. *Pisteuo* (πιστεύω) (verb), “to believe, to be confident in, to be convinced by.”
5. *Pistoo* (πιστοῦ) (verb), “to make faithful, to prove oneself faithful in something, to show oneself faithful.”

B. Classical Usage

1. First attested of the words with *pis-* is the (verbal) adjective *pistos*, with the privative *apistos*.
2. It has the active and passive senses of “trusting” and “worthy of trust” (“reliable”).
3. It bears only the latter sense in Homer, but, since apistos is used by him for “distrustful” (e.g., Odyssey 14, 150), it is evident that both meanings are original; they recur in the noun *pistis*.
4. Rudolph Bultmann commenting on the noun’s classical usage, writes, “*Pistis* means a. (abstractly) ‘confidence,’ trust,” with reference in this sense to persons, relations (Thucydides I, 120, 5) and also things. In so far as it contains an element of uncertainty, trust can be contrasted with knowledge, Sophocles Trach. 588-593 and expressly in Plato (Resp. VI, 511d-e). Nevertheless, it can also mean “conviction” and (subj.) “certainty,” for doxe men epetai pistis, Aristot. An., III, 3, p. 428a, 18-20. Parmen. contrasts *pistis* aitheles (Fr. 1, 30 [Diels, I, 230, 12] “dependable truth” or “trust in what is real”) with broton doxai. In Resp. VI, 505 e Plato speaks of *pistis* nominos (“firm belief”), and in Tim. 37bc he refers to doxai and pistexis, which are bebaioi and aletheis though they have to be differentiated, of course from nous and episteme. Similarly, Plato contrasts *pistis* orthe and episteme in Resp. X, 601e. In many cases, however, *pistis* is “firm conviction” without such distinctions. b. In acc. with the Greek feel for language *pistis* can denote not only the confidence one has but also the confidence one enjoys (cf. II, 233, 39 ff. doxa), i.e., ‘trustworthiness.’ This is related to ‘reliability’ (175, 34; 176, 3), though there is a distinction. It is the same as the pass. pistuesthai. Plutarch Pericles 33, 2 (I, 170a) etc. also n. 25. Stress is often laid on the fact that this *pistis* is a higher endowment than wealth. In this sense *pistis* is related to paradoxe (Polybius 1, 5, 5) and apodoxe (Polybius 1, 43, 4). c. Concretely *pistis* means the ‘guarantee’ which creates the possibility of trust, that which may be relied on, or the assurance of reliability, ‘assurance.’ The first use here is in the sphere of sacral law; *pistis* is often combined with orkos, Herodotus IX, 92; Plato Leg. III, 701c etc. and we find pistexis (pistin) didomai and lambanein or dechesthai. *Pistis* is the ‘oath of fidelity,’ ‘the pledge of faithfulness,’ ‘security.’ This leads on the one side to the sense of ‘certainty,’ ‘trustworthiness,’ on the other to that of ‘means of proof,’ ‘proof.’ In particular *pistis* denotes the reliability of persons, ‘faithfulness.’ It belongs especially to friendship (philia)” (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament volume 6, pages 176-177).

5. Otto Michel makes the following comment regarding the word’s classical usage, he writes, “In classical literature *pistis* means the trust that a man may place in men or the gods (Hesiód, Works, 372; Sophocles OT, 1445), creditibility (Sophocles OC, 611), credit in business (Demosthenes 36, 57), guarantee (Aeschylus Frag. 394), proof (Democ. 125), or something entrusted (IG 14, 2012 A 23)” (NIDNTT volume 1, page 594).

6. Liddel and Scott list the following classical meanings for the word (page 1408):

   a. trust in others, faith
   b. persuasion of a thing, confidence, assurance
   c. in subjective sense, good faith, trustworthiness, honesty
   d. of things, credence, credit
   e. in a commercial sense, credit
   f. position of trust or trusteeship
   g. Theologically, faith, opposite of sight and knowledge
   h. that which gives confidence
   i. assurance, pledge of good faith, guarantee
7. In the Hellenistic period during the struggle with scepticism and atheism *pistis* acquired the sense of conviction as to the existence and activity of the gods. It took over the place of the older nomizo (deem, hold, believe that; cf. Plutarch De superstitione, 11; Pericles, 32; Amatorius, 13). The didactic element now emerged as the general and basic meaning. *Pistis* as faith in God stood for theoretical conviction. But stress was laid on the belief that life was constituted in accordance with this conviction. To that extent *pistis* could assume the practical features of the older eusebeia (piety; cf. Plutarch, De sera numinis vindicta, 3; De Pythiae Oraculis, 18). The tension between the visible and invisible, the physical and spiritual world likewise left behind it clear traces in discussion. The result was a materialized concept of faith which in the philosophically articulate doctrinal system of Neo-Platonism called for a definite, intellectualistic conviction, conditioned by tradition (Plotinus, Enneads, 1, 3, 3; 5, 8, 11; Porphyry, Ad Marcellam, 21 ff.).

8. *Pistis* acquired a special significance in the writings of the Stoics in the sense of “reliability, faithfulness” (Epictetus Diss. II, 4, 1).

9. The Stoic philosopher expressed his recognition of the divine ordering of the world, the centre of which was himself as an autonomous moral person (Epict. 2, 14, 11-13).

10. *Pistis* reveals the essence of man (Epict. 2, 4, 1).

11. Man’s fidelity to his moral destiny leads to fidelity towards others (Epict. 2, 4, 1-3; 2, 22).

12. *Pistis* is thus solidity of character according to the Stoic philosopher and it is typical that pistos and *pistis* are used abstractly with no object needing to be supplied.

13. Primarily then, *pistis* is an attitude of man to himself, not to others.

14. In Stoicism, then, *pistis* has no religious significance in the sense of denoting man’s relation to deity or of having deity and its sway as objects.

15. The attitude of *pistis* is, however, a religious attitude to the degree that in it man, as *pistos, eleutheros* and *aidemon*, actualizes his relationship to God.

16. In the mystery religions faith denotes abandonment to the deity by following his instruction and teaching, and by putting oneself under his protection (Apul., Met., 17, 25-28; P. Oxy., 11, 1380, 152).

18. In the Corpus Hermeticum of syncretistic, Platonic revelations of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., faith is a higher form of knowledge.

19. It thus belongs to the realm of nous (reason, mind).

20. In a mystical way man is led out of the realm of the Logos, until his spirit comes to rest in the knowledge of faith.

21. He thus participates in the divine (Corp. Herm., 9, 10; Ascl., 29).

22. Besides Judaism and Christianity, the mystery religions stand out in their demand of faith in their divinities and the revelations and teaching delivered by them (e.g., the cult of Isis and Osiris).

23. In this way salvation (which in the mystery religions was equated with divinization) was promised to the believer.

C. LXX Usage

1. There are 5 Hebrew words for “faith”:
   a. *Amen*: “to lean on God”
   b. *Batah*: “to trust, to pick up your problems and slam them on the Lord” (Batah comes from a wrestling term)
   c. *Hasah*: “to take refuge, to hide like a bunny in the cleft of a rock” (the believer is to hide in the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ)
   d. *Yahal*: “to trust in extreme pain”
   e. *Qawa*: “to be a strand of rope twisted into a great rope, and therefore made strong, trust” (Isa. 40:31)

2. The noun *pistis* translates the following Hebrew terms in the LXX:
   a. *‘amun* (אָמוּן) (noun), “faithfulness” (Dt. 32:20).
   b. *‘emunah* (faithfulness) (noun), “trust, faithfulness” (1 Chr. 9:22; Prv. 12:22); “truth” (Jer. 5:1, 3).
   c. *‘amanah* (noun), “agreement” (Neh. 9:38).
3. The noun pistis appears 57 times in the LXX, of which 33 are canonical.
4. The LXX indicates that the Greek term pistis especially corresponds to the Hebrew term ‘emunah, “fidelity, faithfulness.”
5. The related verb form ‘aman describes a faithful attitude toward another human being and especially used to denote a relationship with God (Gn. 15:6; Ex. 14:31; 2 Chr. 20:20).
6. It also indicates a trust in God with the respect to His Word and His promises (Josh. 3:5; Psa. 106:12 [LXX 105:12]), and obedience to His commands (Psa. 119:66 [118:66]).
7. The noun ‘emunah occurs 48 times in the Hebrew Bible and is one of many meaning “firmness” or “steadfastness.”
8. A distinction may be drawn between this noun and other related words, at least in contexts where the noun refers to a human quality of conduct.
9. The noun ‘emunah refers to conduct in the sense of conscientiousness.
10. A clear example is in 2 Kgs. 12:15, where it is recorded that workmen repairing the temple did so “conscientiously.”
11. Jehoshaphat charges judges to work “with a conscientious and honest heart” (2 Chr. 19:9).
12. This same quality leads to David and Samuel appointing certain individuals as gatekeepers, those who hold offices “on account of their conscientiousness” (1 Chr. 9:22).
13. The text could read “offices of trust.”
14. One must make a choice to live a life governed by doctrine (Ps. 119:30).
15. Trustworthiness is a prerequisite to living a life pleasing to God (Prv. 12:22).
16. One is rewarded by Yahweh according to one’s righteous and trustworthy behavior (1 Sam. 26:23).
17. Moreover, the two qualities go hand in hand (Hab. 2:4).
18. The noun ‘emunah is applied to the Lord to express His faithfulness, dependability (Dt. 32:4).
19. It is frequently listed among the attributes of God (1 Sm. 26:23; Ps. 36:5; 40:10; Lm. 3:23).
20. It describes His works (Ps. 33:4), and His words (Ps. 119:86; 143:1).
21. ‘Emuna is also used to refer to those whose lives the Lord establishes.
22. He expects to see faithfulness in them (Prv. 12:22; 2 Chr. 19:9).
23. Indeed, such faithfulness or a life of faith is characteristic of those justified in God’s sight (Hab. 2:4).
24. God’s Word of truth establishes man’s way of truth or faithfulness (Ps. 119:30).
25. From this we can also see the concept of a duty being entrusted to a believer which becomes his trust (faithful responsibility, 1 Chr. 9:22; 2 Chr. 31:15, etc.) or office.
26. ‘Emunah is not so much an abstract quality, “reliability,” but a way of acting which grows out of inner stability, “conscientiousness.”
27. It emphasizes one’s own inner attitude and the conduct it produces and often conveys the idea of inner stability, integrity, conscientiousness, which is essential for any responsible service.
28. It describes a living act of trust in the OT, and also the dimension of human existence in a historical situation.

D. Deissmann
1. The work of the great Greek scholar Adolph Deissmann in his masterpiece Light from the Ancient East (page 309) has revealed that the NT writers such as Paul no doubt employed phrases that were common in everyday conversation during the period of history in which they lived.
2. Deissmann makes the following insiteful comment regarding Paul’s use of pistis in the NT, he writes, “But there are other ways in which St. Paul made use of the forms and formulae of his age, as they presented themselves to him, principally, no doubt, in inscriptions. When in reviewing his past work he professes: ‘I have kept faith,’ and when, probably in the 2nd century A.D., the Ephesian M. Aurelius Agathopus, full of gratitude to Artemis, makes the same profession in an inscription in the theatre-‘I have kept faith,’ both no doubt are drawing from the same source, from the stock formulae current in Asia Minor. On the other hand the metaphor employed by the apostle in the same passage, ‘I have fought the good fight...Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness...’ reminds one of phrases in an inscription relating to an athlete of the 2nd century A.D., also in the theatre at Ephesus:‘He fought three fights, and twice was crowned.’ No doubt St. Paul in his time read inscriptions like this.”
3. He then provides the following footnote pertaining to this article, he writes, “The parallels show that pistis in the passage in St. Paul means ‘faith’ in the sense of ‘loyalty,’ not the ‘the faith’ in the sense of ‘creed.’ Further passages are quoted by W. Jerusalem, Wiener Studien, I, p. 56.”

E. NT Usage
1. The noun *pistis* appears 244 times in the NT.
2. Bultmann commenting on the word’s NT usage, writes, “As in Greek this can mean both ‘faithfulness’ and ‘trust,’ though it seldom used in the former sense. As ‘trust’ or ‘faith’ it occurs only in religious usage. Here it is mostly abs. Though it can be construed with eis with epi c. acc. (Hb. 6:1), with pros c. acc. (1 Th. 1:8; Phlm. 5). With en too it has the same meaning and an obj. gen. can be used instead of prepositions” (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament volume 6, page 204).
   a. that which causes trust and faithfulness, reliability, solemn promise, oath, proof, pledge.
   b. trust, confidence, faith in the active sense=believing-faith, trust, confidence in God.
   c. that which is believed, body of faith or belief, doctrine.
4. Louw and Nida give the following 6-fold usage of *pistis* in the NT (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains volume 2):
   a. that which is completely believable - ‘what can be fully believed, that which is worthy of belief, believable evidence, proof’ (page 371).
   b. to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance - ‘to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust, faith, trust’ (pages 376-377).
   c. the state of being someone in whom complete confidence can be placed - ‘trustworthiness, dependability, faithfulness’ (page 377).
   d. Christian faith (page 379).
   e. the content of what Christians believe - ‘the faith, beliefs, doctrine’ (page 379).
   f. promise or pledge of faithfulness and loyalty - ‘promise, pledge to be faithful’ (page 421).
5. There are 3 basic meanings for *pistis* in the NT.
6. There is 1st the active usage meaning “faith.”
7. The word has 3 connotations under this usage:
   a. saving faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
   b. 3 stages of the faith rest drill (Rm. 4:20; Heb. 4:3).
   c. faith perception as a part of spiritual metabolism.
8. There is also a passive usage meaning “that which is believed, the body of faith, doctrine” (Gal. 1:23; 2 Pt. 1:5; 1 Tm. 1:19; 4:1, 6; 6:10; 2 Tm. 2:18; 4:7; Hb. 11).
9. Lastly, the noun *pistis* is used as an attribute meaning “faithfulness, reliability” (Gal. 3:22; Titus 2:10; 2 Th. 1:4).
10. To express the newness and complete otherness of the relation to God which is implied by *pistis* as a turning and constant reference to God’s saving act, Paul connects the blessing of salvation strictly, consistently and exclusively to *pistis*.
11. Like Judaism, he describes this blessing as dikaiosune.
12. But this leads Paul to make a statement, which is paradoxial for Judaism, namely, that dikaiosune is given to *pistis*, that it is not, therefore, ascribed to man on the basis of works.
13. Man can stand before God only in virtue of his *pistis* and not in virtue of his works.
14. The whole of Galatians combats the possible misunderstanding that *pistis* has to be supplemented by the accomplishment of certain works of the Law.
15. It is thus made perfectly plain that *pistis* is man’s absolute committal to God, a committal in which man cannot make any resolutions of his own—which would be in the sphere of erga— but which can only be committal to God’s grace, an answer to God’s act.
16. Equally plain, however, is the fact that this committal is a movement of the will; it is indeed the radical decision of the will in which man delivers himself up.
17. It is the act in which men really is, whereas in erga he always stands alongside that which he accomplishes.
18. In Paul the character of *pistis* as act is expressed on the one side by the fact that he understands *pistis* as hupakoe and on the other quite unintentionally by the fact that, unlike Augustine, he never describes faith as inspired.
19. Though the Spirit is given the believer, *pistis* is not a gift of the Spirit.
20. Faith is the manner of life of the man who is crucified with Christ, who can no longer live as an I, who lives in Christ (Gal. 2:19).
21. If one does not understand the paradox that _pistis_ as a movement of the will is the negation of the will itself, the antithesis of _pistis_ and _erga nomou_ will easily be misunderstood, as though _pistis_ were another work of achievement.

22. On this view the Pauline rejection of works would be taken to apply only to the works of the Mosaic Law, while faith as an act of obedience would always entail a certain measure of activity on man’s part.

23. In truth, however, more than a measure of activity is presupposed in faith.

24. Faith is act in the supreme sense.

25. As such it is the opposite of every work or achievement, since the act of faith consists in the negation of all the work which establishes man’s existence.

26. That Paul rejects _erga_, not in a limited, but in a fundamental sense, is shown by the fact that the antithesis of _pistis_ and _erga_ is accompanied by the antithesis of _charis_ and _erga_.

27. Paul deliberately opposes _charis_ to _ergazesthai_ which can claim a _misthos_.

28. He also fashions the antithesis _kata charin_–_kata opheilema_ (R. 4:4f.).

29. Moreover, it is clear that when Paul demands of the believer a fulfilling of the Law in a new sense, namely, in _agape_ (R. 13:8-10; Gl. 5:14), he rejects the _erga nomou_, not in respect of their content (as the Law of Moses), but in respect of the manner of their fulfillment.

30. Finally, Paul makes it quite clear why he rejects works.

31. The way of _erga nomou_ is a false way of salvation because man seeks to base upon it his _kauchema_, his claim before God.

32. Since the Jewish righteousness of works and pagan wisdom are both affected by the bringing to nothing of human boasting, it is evident that in rejecting _erga_ Paul is rejecting a specific and indeed a characteristic attitude—the attitude of human self-assurance before God, or the attempt to attain it.

33. Thus _pistis_ as genuine _hupakoe_, as the basic attitude made possible by God’s gracious act in Christ, stands opposed not only to the specifically Jewish attitude but also to the specifically pagan attitude of man, i.e., to the attitude of natural man generally, who fancies that he can stand before God in his own strength!

34. It is clear that as this attitude _pistis_ is not something which man can accomplish incidentally or along with other things.

35. It is the basic attitude of life, which determines all detailed conduct.

36. Also clear is the fact that to come to believe and to be a believer are very closely related, since the abandonment of human certainty in the act of believing must be continued in the form of a steady overpowering of the natural man.

37. To the degree that _pistis_ as genuine _hupakoe_ is the surrender of the natural man, it is the eschatological attitude of man which is made possible by God’s eschatological act.

38. It is the attitude of the new man.

39. This eschatological character of _pistis_ is marked by the fact that _en pistei_ is parallel to _en kurio_ and _en chariti_.

40. These expressions denote eschatological existence.

41. He who is _en Christo_ is a new creature (2 Co. 5:17).

42. The period of _charis_ has brought to an end the age of _nomos_ (R. 6:14).

43. The coming of _pistis_ is the eschatological time (Gl. 3:23).

44. Paul did not develop the meaning of _pistis_ in such express antithesis to the Gnostic concept as he did to the Jewish.

45. Nevertheless, his statements are plain enough.

46. As an eschatological attitude, _pistis_ is not to be misunderstood as though it were itself eschatological fulfillment.

47. It is not, as in Philo, a diathesis of the soul.

48. It is not the _athlon_, the reward of conflict.

49. The man who is justified in faith (Phil. 3:9) is constantly engaged in the struggle for perfection, in pursuit of the _brefbaio_ (Phil. 3:12-14).

50. There is not actualised in _pistis_, as in the _gnosis_ of the Gnostics, the definitiveness of eschatological being.

51. Faith does not escape the provisional nature of historical being.

52. It actualizes eschatological being in temporality.

53. For, as it is always referred back to what God has done in Christ (R. 10:9), it is also orientated to the future, to what God will do (R. 6:8: _pisteuomen hoti kai suzesomen auto_).

54. The relation to past and future forms a unity (1 Th. 4:14), for God’s act in the past is an eschatological act which controls the whole future.
55. Related to the future is the awareness of a new existence which is given along with faith (2 Co. 4:13 f. R. 6:8).
56. Thus elpis stands alongside pistis.
57. And though pistis as the reference to God’s grace can never be exhausted even in the eschatological consummation, though it will “abide” (1 Co. 3:13), nevertheless the present life in pistis is a provisional one inasmuch as it does not include sight: dia pisteos gar peripatoumen, ou dia eidous (2 Co. 5:7).
58. Our soteria is not made a disposable possession by pistis.
59. It has become a sure hope (R. 8:24f.; Gl. 5:5).
60. If pistis as the constitution of Christian life means No longer in relation to Judaism, it means Not yet in relation to Gnosticism.
61. Christian being in pistis is thus a paradoxical eschatological being in historical existence.
62. It is being in both the No longer and the Not yet.
63. This is most clearly depicted in Phil. 3:12-14.
64. No longer, for the resolve of faith has abandoned the past of self-confidence and self-boasting (Phil. 3:4-8).
65. But this resolve, since it leads under God’s charis and not out of historical existence, must be sustained by constant renewal.
66. The forgotten past is always present in the sense of being overcame.
67. To that degree recollection (not remorse) is part of faith, whose forgetting is not a putting out of mind but a no longer being entangled.
68. Not yet, to the degree that the surrender of the old being is a surrender of the self-assurance which thinks it can control its own existence, to the degree, then, that this surrender rules out any receiving in exchange of a disposable new possession.
69. There is no new disposable possession in place of an old one.
70. The change from Then to Now implies the renunciation of all desire to possess and a radical committal to the grace of God.
71. Not yet in relation to the man concerning whom no kateilephenai can be asserted in his historical existence, but Already to the degree that katalempthenai hupo Christou Iesou applies to him.