Can Christ Trust Us?

Faith, Faithfulness, and the Relational World of Pistis

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Central Truth

Biblical faith is more than intellectual agreement or even saving belief. The Greek pistis word family describes a relational world that includes faith, trust, faithfulness, reliability, and trustworthiness. The believer places faith in Christ because Christ is perfectly faithful and trustworthy; yet Scripture also describes Christ as regarding His servants as faithful and entrusting His work to them. The relationship is therefore genuinely reciprocal, though never symmetrical.

Reciprocal does not mean symmetrical.

Opening Question

Begin by asking the class a deliberately provocative question: “Can Christ trust us?” Most Christians are comfortable saying that we place our faith in Christ, but the reverse wording can sound immediately wrong. That discomfort is useful because it exposes how narrowly the English word faith is often understood. The goal of this lesson is not to argue that Christ exercises saving faith in human beings. Rather, it is to recover the broader relational world of pistis and pistos and then ask what 1 Timothy 1:12 means when Paul says that Christ regarded him as faithful and placed him into service.

1. What Do We Mean by Faith?

In ordinary Christian speech, faith often means believing the gospel or placing one's trust in Christ for salvation. Those meanings are thoroughly biblical, but they do not exhaust the Greek word family. Pistis can refer to faith or trust and, in appropriate contexts, to faithfulness. Pistos can describe someone as faithful, reliable, or trustworthy, while pisteuo expresses believing or trusting. The words belong to a relational field in which confidence is connected to the reliability of the one trusted.

This matters because biblical faith is not merely the act of accepting a proposition. Christian faith has content, but it also has an object whose character warrants trust. We trust Christ because He is faithful. Faith therefore cannot be separated from the trustworthiness of the One in whom faith rests.

Faith is meaningful because someone is trustworthy.

2. 1 Timothy 1:12 — The Text That Raises the Question

Paul thanks Christ Jesus for strengthening him and says that Christ “considered me faithful, putting me into service” (1 Timothy 1:12). The crucial Greek expression is piston me hegesato. Piston is the accusative form of

pistos—faithful, reliable, or trustworthy—and hegesato means that Christ regarded, considered, or judged Paul to be so. The result is not merely an inward opinion about Paul. Christ places him into service.

The order of Paul's statement is essential. Christ first strengthens Paul. Only then does Paul speak of being regarded as faithful and placed into ministry. The verse therefore cannot reasonably be reduced to a modern self-help slogan in which Jesus simply tells Paul to believe in himself.

Christ calls → Christ strengthens → Christ regards as faithful → Christ entrusts with service.

3. The Man Entrusted Was Formerly an Enemy

Paul immediately prevents us from interpreting his faithfulness as an impressive natural résumé. In the next verse he identifies his former life as that of a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent aggressor. The man Christ placed into service had once opposed Christ. Paul therefore points away from innate merit and toward mercy, grace, transformation, and divine empowerment.

This is one of the most important theological safeguards in the lesson. Christ's entrusting of Paul is not a reward for an unblemished past. Grace does not merely overlook Paul's former hostility; grace changes the man and gives him a new vocation. Christ does not simply discover a ready-made apostle. He calls, strengthens, and forms the servant whom He then entrusts with ministry.

Christ does not merely find faithful servants. He makes faithful servants and then genuinely entrusts His work to them.

4. Entrustment and Stewardship

The same relational logic appears in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2. Paul describes Christian ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, then says that what is required of stewards is that they be found pistos—faithful or trustworthy. Stewardship presupposes entrustment. Something valuable belonging to another person has been placed into the steward's care.

That provides a useful way to speak about Christian ministry. The gospel does not belong to us. The church does not belong to us. The people we teach do not belong to us. Our gifts and opportunities are received rather than possessed independently. Christ remains Lord and owner, yet He genuinely gives His servants responsibility for things that matter to Him.

The immediate context of 1 Timothy strengthens the point even further. In 1 Timothy 1:11 Paul says that the gospel was entrusted to him, and in verse 12 he says Christ considered him trustworthy and appointed him to service. The language of entrustment and trustworthiness stands side by side.

5. So Can We Say, “Jesus Has Faith in Us”?

At this point return to the opening question. If the phrase means that Jesus exercises saving faith in us, the answer is no. Christ is the Savior, not one who must be saved. If the phrase means that Jesus depends upon our abilities in the way we depend upon His sufficiency, the answer is again no. Paul's first statement is that Christ strengthened him.

But if someone argues that there can be no movement of trust, confidence, or entrustment from Christ toward His servants because the pistis word family can only describe human belief directed toward Christ, that definition is too narrow. Paul explicitly says that Christ regarded him as pistos and placed him into service. In ordinary relational terms, entrusting meaningful responsibility to someone regarded as trustworthy is an act of confidence.

Christ does not exercise saving faith in us, but He genuinely regards His servants as trustworthy and entrusts His work to them.

6. Reciprocal, but Never Symmetrical

The distinction between reciprocity and symmetry keeps the lesson theologically balanced. The relationship moves in both directions, but the two movements are not equal. We depend absolutely upon Christ; Christ does not depend upon us in the same manner. Our faith rests upon His perfect faithfulness, while our faithfulness is derivative, enabled by grace, and exercised under His lordship.

Our Relationship to Christ	Christ's Relationship to Us
We trust Him.	He entrusts responsibility to us.
We depend upon Him.	He strengthens us.
We receive salvation.	He gives salvation.
We recognize His faithfulness.	He calls us to faithfulness.
We entrust ourselves to Him.	He entrusts His work to us.

RECIPROCAL ≠ SYMMETRICAL

7. A Brief Scholarly Excursus: Pistis Christou

The wider Pauline discussion includes the debated construction pistis Christou in texts such as Romans 3:22, Galatians 2:16, and Philippians 3:9. The grammatical construction can be interpreted as “faith in Christ” or as “Christ's faith/faithfulness,” and serious interpreters have defended both readings. The debate is useful here because it reminds us that pistis language cannot automatically be reduced to one English gloss.

This lesson does not require a decision on that debate. First Timothy 1:12 is clearer for our present purpose: Christ regards Paul as pistos and places him into service. The pistis Christou discussion should therefore remain a supporting observation rather than become the controlling argument.

8. The Question Turns Toward Us

The lesson should not end with a lexical victory in a theological debate. Paul understood his ministry as an act of mercy and entrustment. Christ had placed something precious into the hands of a man who once opposed Him. That turns the discussion from semantics toward discipleship.

Ask the class to identify what Christ has entrusted to them. For one person it may be teaching. For another it may be children or grandchildren, financial resources, leadership, hospitality, spiritual gifts, influence, or the

opportunity to disciple a single person. Faithfulness is not measured by whether the stewardship appears impressive. The question is whether we are trustworthy with what belongs to Another.

I know that I can trust Christ. But with what He has entrusted to me, can I be found faithful?

Suggested Discussion Questions

- How does the broader pistis/pistos word family change the way you think about biblical faith?
- Why is the statement that Christ strengthened Paul so important before Paul says Christ considered him faithful?
- What does Paul's former life contribute to our understanding of grace and trustworthiness?
- Why does stewardship necessarily involve entrustment?
- How would you explain the difference between saying “Jesus has saving faith in us” and saying “Christ entrusts His work to faithful servants”?
- What has Christ entrusted to you personally, and what would faithfulness look like in that stewardship?

Conclusion

The Christian life begins and continues through trust in the One who is perfectly trustworthy. We place our faith in Christ because His faithfulness never fails. Yet the relationship does not end with our trusting Him. Christ calls people by grace, strengthens them for service, regards them as faithful, and entrusts His work to them. These movements are not equal, interchangeable, or symmetrical, but they are genuinely relational.

The remarkable feature of 1 Timothy 1:12 is therefore not merely that Paul trusted Christ. Christ took a former blasphemer and persecutor, showed him mercy, strengthened him, regarded him as trustworthy, and placed the gospel into his hands. The proper response is neither self-confidence nor false humility, but faithful stewardship.