

Using EBSCO SmartText

https://support.ebsco.com/knowledge_base/detail.php?id=3736 says the following.

1. SmartText Search takes the chunk of text entered into the search box and first runs it through a sophisticated summarizer, pulling out all the main words/phrases.
2. SmartText Search takes all of those main words/phrases and queries them against the database, getting back a sorted list of the words/phrases that are most relevant as compared to that database's content.
3. Based on this result, a relevancy weight is assigned to each word/phrase.
4. A search string is then built OR'ing the terms and their weights together, and a search is conducted against the database.
5. A relevant Result List is returned.

So SmartText is meant to take natural language input. For testing purposes, we are going to use abstracts for two articles on the same topic: David L. Stubbs, "The Shape of Soteriology and the *Pistis Christou* Debate" (*Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, [2008]:137-57) and R. Barry Matlock, "The Rhetoric of *Pistis* in Paul: Galatians 2.16, 3.22, Romans 3.22, and Philippians 3.9" (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, [2007]:173-203).

1. Abstract for Stubbs article:

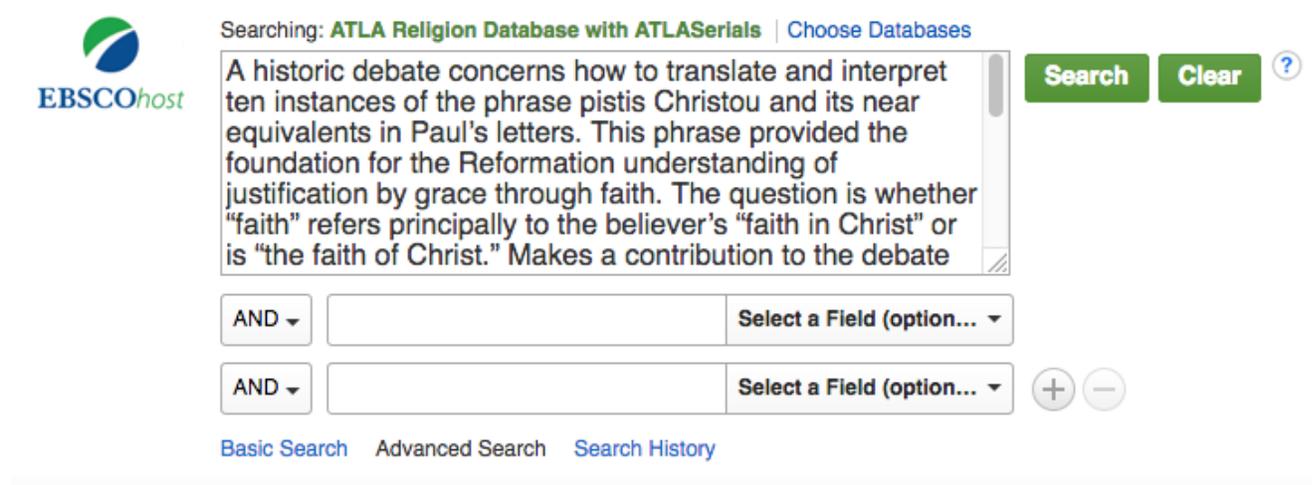
A historic debate concerns how to translate and interpret ten instances of the phrase *pistis Christou* and its near equivalents in Paul's letters. This phrase provided the foundation for the Reformation understanding of justification by grace through faith. The question is whether "faith" refers principally to the believer's "faith in Christ" or is "the faith of Christ." Makes a contribution to the debate from a theological angle, but describing two "patterns of soteriology" which are in play, and examining how easily these patterns can be read onto what Paul writes concerning three issues: salvation, the Law and the "righteousness of God." The overall theological vision which includes three facets – a Christologically centered understanding of the *pistis Christou* passages, a broader understanding of *pistis*, and the centering of soteriology around the concept of "participation in Christ" – provides the most convincing interpretational matrix for reading Paul. Points out implications for contemporary theology.

2. Abstract for Matlock article:

The question of *pistis christou* (Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Rom 3:22, 26; Phil 3:9, cf Eph 3:12) has proved resistant to resolution. The most frequent argument against the objective

genitive (faith in Christ) on behalf of the subjective (the faithfulness of Christ) is that the former creates an unacceptable redundancy where one finds two or more pistis / pisteuo phrases side by side (Gal 2:16; 3:22; Rom 3:22; Phil 3:9). Offers a fresh look at these verses, accounting for five of the seven pistis christou phrases. Makes a positive inquiry into the interrelation of and interaction between these pistis / pisteuo phrases and the other elements of their respective contexts – and the role such consideration might play in disambiguating pistis christou. Attends specifically to matters that bear on pistis christou, and more particularly to matters of rhetoric / style / structure. Offers a number of exegetical observations that weigh heavily in favor of the objective genitive reading.

For our test we copy an abstract into the search box and record the results.



The screenshot shows the EBSCOhost search interface. At the top left is the EBSCOhost logo. The search bar contains the text: "A historic debate concerns how to translate and interpret ten instances of the phrase pistis Christou and its near equivalents in Paul's letters. This phrase provided the foundation for the Reformation understanding of justification by grace through faith. The question is whether 'faith' refers principally to the believer's 'faith in Christ' or is 'the faith of Christ.'" Makes a contribution to the debate". To the right of the search bar are "Search" and "Clear" buttons. Below the search bar are two rows of search filters, each with an "AND" dropdown, a field for selecting a field, and a "Select a Field (option...)" dropdown. At the bottom of the search bar area are links for "Basic Search", "Advanced Search", and "Search History".

Search Options

Search Modes and Expanders

Search modes [?](#)

- Boolean/Phrase
- Find all my search terms
- Find any of my search terms
- SmartText Searching [Hint](#)

Here are results based on 10/10/2018 searches.

Search expression	Number found	Note
copied abstract from RTA about an article by Stubbs on pistis Christou and pasted it into ATLA after choosing smart-text searching	13,681	Listed Stubbs's article 1 st , and many of the first 50 were relevant to pistis Christou.
redid the search having it search within the full text also	326,970	Listed Stubbs's article 19 th . A number of the first 50 were relevant to pistis Christou.
copied abstract from RTA about an article by Matlock on pistis Christou and pasted it into ATLA after choosing smart-text searching	7,630	Did not list Matlock's article within the first 500 results. Many of the first 50 were on pistis Christou.
included the option to search the full text	255,138	Listed Matlock's article 4 th . Many of the first 50 were relevant.

The two abstracts retrieved very different numbers of citations. Pistis Christou is a distinctive search term, so high precision is easily attainable just using that phrase.

So what happens if we use just a few terms with SmartText? Here are results based on 10/10/2018 searches

Search expression	Search Option	Number found	Note
"city of God"	Boolean/Phrase	345	Exact match, words adjacent in metadata. Since "of" is a stopword, however, "city of God" matches the same results as "city in God".
"city of God"	Boolean/Phrase + Full Text	5,928	As above.
"city of God"	SmartText	134,297	Ignores quote marks. Approximately looks for "city" OR "God" somewhere in the record . Most items retrieved are irrelevant. Because of ranking, items listed first tend to be relevant.
"city of God"	SmartText + Full Text	570,629	Ignores quote marks. Approximately looks for "city" OR "God" somewhere in the article . Most items items are irrelevant. Because of ranking, items listed first tend to be relevant.

Based on EBSCO's description and some experimenting, it appears that . . .

- SmartText ignores quote marks and search operators. SmartText automatically matches final s and final apostrophe s.
- Rare words are given high weight even if not important for a search so I'm guessing each search term is assigned a weight inversely proportional to frequency in the database. This is a common strategy.
- Weights assigned to terms vary by field; a match in a subject field is given more weight than a match in a note field, for example. This is a common strategy.
- There appears to be a minimum non-zero threshold weight below which records are not included in the results list (so a Boolean search using the same terms sometimes retrieves more). This is a common strategy.
- Ranking appears to be based on sum of matched weights plus other factors like age of document. This is a common strategy.

If you specify a Boolean search which finds nothing, then EBSCOHost automatically reformulates the search with SmartText and tries again. The error message looks like the following.

Note: Your initial search query did not yield any results. However, using SmartText Searching, results were found based on your keywords.