

## **Saving Faith is the Attitude of a Life—*The Scholarly Evidence***

In the article “Is Saving Faith the Act of a Moment or the Attitude of a Life?” it was determined from the Scriptures examined that saving faith is not simply the act of a moment, but the attitude of a life, and that the initial decision must be perpetually implemented throughout the life of the believer. Indeed, the believer’s present possession of eternal life is conditional upon a *living and persevering faith* union with the source of life, Jesus Christ. The following is all the scholarly evidence compiled from my research that confirms this understanding of saving faith.

I will begin by quoting from scholars who explain the significance of the Greek present tense verb for “believes” found throughout the Gospel of John before looking at specific comments from scholars and commentators on the following passages: John 1:12; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29; 35, 37, 40, 47, 54, 56, 57; 7:38; 8:12; 10:27-29; 11:25-26; 20:30-31; and 1 John 5:10-13.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Kysar says,

The Fourth Evangelist never uses the noun, faith or belief, but always and only the verb, to believe. . . . What does this mean? . . . It means that for him belief is not something one *has*. Faith is something one *does*. . . . If faith is always a verb, that surely implies that faith is not something one does once and is unnecessary thereafter. Rather, faith as a verb means that believing is a decision made once only to have to be made over and over again. Faith is a continuing dynamic . . . . This understanding of faith implicit in the use of the verb . . . indicates that the Evangelist’s fundamental concept of faith is that of personal relationship.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel of John there are several words used in certain contexts that are symbolic parallels to “believing” (*pisteuō*). These words will be included in this study: “coming” (*erchomai*), “eating” (*trōgō*) and “drinking” (*pinō*), and “following” (*akoloutheō*). Sometimes the verbs “hearing” (*akouō*) and “looking” (*theōreō*) are intimately tied to the believing that results in the possession of eternal life.

<sup>2</sup> *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 81.

Gerald F. Hawthorne, writing on the “The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,”

observes:

In considering the nature of this faith John described, it is significant to observe, by way of introduction, that although some form of the verb [*pisteuein*] (*to believe*) is used 98 times, never once does the noun form for faith [*pistis*] appear. In addition, the present tense accounts for 54 of these 98 occurrences, and the imperfect tense for 6 more. In other words, the linear concept of action expressed in these two tenses accounts for 60 of the 98 times the verb appears in John. Then too, from among the 5 moods that are employed in this Gospel the participle is used 21 times, exceeded in frequency only by the indicative.

These data could be instructive. Do they not imply on the very surface that there is a dynamic quality to John’s concept of faith that could never be adequately expressed by a noun, and could be best set forth only by those tenses of linear action? Is there not here a hint, at least, that faith was not to be thought of as merely an event (past) but as a continuing attitude throughout life?<sup>3</sup>

J. Harold Greenlee was a well-known Greek Scholar for over 20 years at Asbury Theological Seminary. In 1958, the Seminary began publishing his New Testament Word Studies in *The Herald*. This is what he wrote on the word “Faith”:

Does a single act of faith in Jesus Christ guarantee final salvation and eternal life, or does salvation depend upon continuing faith? This question has been discussed for generations, and it is not likely that this brief chapter will answer it to the satisfaction of everyone. At the same time, there is one aspect of what the New Testament has to say on this subject which has been too much neglected, and it is this aspect of the question which we wish to examine here.

Among the several tenses of the Greek verb, there are two which may be contrasted with each other. One of these tenses speaks of an action as *continuing*: the other refers to a *single* action or an action *completed*. . . . New Testament examples of these two tenses are innumerable. . . .

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<sup>3</sup> *Bibliotheca Sacra* 116 (Apr-Jun) 1959: 117. Matthew Vellanickal had parallel conclusions:

The present tense accounts for the 60 of the 107 occurrences, which indicates the linear concept of action expressed in the use of [*pisteuein*] in Jn. [i.e., John’s Gospel and Epistles]. The participial expression [*ho pisteuōn*, the one believing] is almost proper to John. The preference of Jn for the verb shows that for Jn faith is not a static disposition, but an active commitment, and the Johannine predilection for the participial expression shows that this active commitment is a continual life of commitment. . . . In John the life of faith is so essential to a Christian, so that [*ho pisteuōn*, the one believing] becomes a sort of quasi proper name for a Christian. (*The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings*, 141 and fn. 219)

Our principle concern here, however, is with the word *believe*. This verb occurs in both of the tenses to which we are referring. Here the idea of a single or completed action is often used to refer to an initial act of belief: for example, Acts 19:2 means, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit after you had exercised an initial act of faith?" Ephesians 1:13 suggests, "...in whom you were sealed after you had exercised an initial act of faith"; . . . Hebrews 4:3, "...for we who have believed (exercised an initial act of faith) are entering into his rest."

The tense of continuing action is likewise found with the verb *believe*: for example, Matthew 21:22, "whatsoever you ask in prayer believing (continuing to believe)..."; Luke 8:13, "...who for a time believe"; . . . Romans 15:13, "...fill you with joy and peace as you continue to believe"; and many others.

Each of these tenses, therefore, has its proper place with the verb *believe* as well as with other verbs. There is one context, however, in which *believe* is *always* used with the tense of continuing action in the New Testament and *never* with the tense of completed action. There are the passages in which the believing is said to give eternal life. There are eleven clear passages of this type in the New Testament; let us look at each one, remembering that the tense of *continuing* action is used for the verb *believe* in each of these passages even if the English translation does not make this fact clear:

John 3:15, "...in order that everyone *believing* may have eternal life in him."

John 3:16, "...in order that everyone *believing* in him should not perish but should have eternal life."

John 3:36, "The one *believing* on the Son has eternal life."

John 5:24, "The one hearing my word and *believing* him who sent me has eternal life."

John 6:40, "...that everyone beholding the son and *believing* in him should have eternal life."

John 6:47, "The one *believing* has eternal life."

John 11:25, 26, "The one *believing* in me, even though he dies he shall live; and everyone living and *believing* in me shall never die."

John 20:31, "...and in order that by means of *believing* you may have life in his name."

1 Timothy 1:16, "...for an example to those who afterwards were to *believe* in him to eternal life."

1 John 5:13, "...you who *believe* in the name of the son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

Thus in all eleven of these clear passages in the New Testament in which "believing" is said to bring eternal life, the verb *believe* is in the tense of continuing action. In contrast with this, there are *no* clear similar passages in which the tense of completed or single action is used for the verb *believe*.

Let us try to be fair with the facts, however. There are other New Testament passages in which believing is said to bring salvation. In some of these passages *believe* is in the tense of continuing action, but in other instances the tense of completed or single action is found. The tense of continuing action is used in John 6:35, "the one *believing* in me shall never thirst"; Romans 1:16, "it is the power of God to salvation to everyone *believing*"; and 1 Corinthians 1:21, "it pleased God ...to save the one *believing*" to mention a few. The tense of singular or completed action is found in John 7:39, "...the Spirit, which those who *had believed* were to receive"; Mark 15:32, "Let the Christ... come down now from the cross, in order that we may see and *believe*"; Acts 15:7, "...God chose that

through my mouth the Gentiles should hear...and *believe*"; Acts 16:31, "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus and thou shall be saved"; Romans 10:9, "if thou shalt...*believe* ... thou shalt be saved"; and Ephesians 1:13, "...after you *had believed* you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."

In some of these passages the reference is clearly not to *final* salvation but to the initial act of faith. In other passages it might be possible to understand the passage as referring to either the initial act of saving faith or to final eternal salvation. Yet in the passages in which the tense of the single or completed action is used, there is not one which clearly refers to final salvation and could not equally well, or better, refer to the initial act of saving faith or some aspect of faith other than final salvation. . . .

If we take the most obvious meaning of the tense of each New Testament instance in which believing is said to give eternal life, the believing is continued believing, not merely a single act of faith. Furthermore, there is no New Testament passage in which the tense describing a single act of faith clearly promises eternal life.

As we said at the beginning, these facts from the Greek present tenses doubtless will not settle this question. There are other arguments and other factors to be considered. It does appear, however, that the Greek tenses have something to say on this subject. It appears what they say is that *eternal security is firmly promised to "the one believing"—the person who continues to believe in Christ—but not to "the one having believed"—the person who has merely exercised one single act of faith some time in the past.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Words from the Word: 52 Word Studies from the Original New Testament Greek*, 49-52. Greenlee's discussion on the word "Believe" gives parallel conclusions:

For centuries people have argued as to whether a person is guaranteed eternal life by his one act of faith in Christ when he is converted, or whether he must keep believing after his conversion with the possibility that he may willfully abandon his faith and fail finally to have eternal life. . . . It is not likely that this long-standing controversy will be settled by one brief chapter. At the same time, the Greek New Testament does give support to those who hold that salvation is based upon a relationship of faith—a continuing faith—rather than upon one single act of faith which can never be revoked.

In the Greek language of the New Testament there are two kinds of action which are expressed by two tenses of the verb: one is continuing action, the other is single action. . . . Unfortunately, the difference between these two meanings of continuing action and a single action are often not made clear in English translations.

These two kinds of action may be expressed, of course, by any verb. In the case of the verb *believe*, the two meanings will be *to exercise on act of faith* and *to continue to believe*.

In the New Testament there are passages in which each of these tenses of *believe* is used. For example, "only believe, and she shall be well" (Luke 8:50), is the tense of a single action—that is, "Put your trust in men as an act of faith." In Matthew 21:22, "believing, you shall receive" is the tense of continuing action—that is, "Continue to believe and trust."

There are two important facts concerning salvation involved in the verb *believe* in the New Testament. In the first place, although both tenses are used, the form meaning *to continue to believe* is used almost twice as often as the form meaning *one act of faith*. In the second place, and even more significantly, in every passage in the New Testament where *believing* is clearly spoken of as leading to eternal life, it is the tense of continuing action which is used for *believe*.

The tense describing a single act of faith describes the initial action of faith whereby we become saved. This is the sense of Acts 16:31, for example. Here the Philippian jailer has asked Paul what he must do to "become saved (single action), and Paul replies, "Believe (exercise an

Daniel Steele (1824-1914), a Methodist pastor and professor of NT Greek at Boston University, arrived at parallel conclusions in his 1878 book, *Mile-stone Papers: Doctrinal, Ethical, and Experimental on Christian Progress*. In a chapter titled: “Tense Readings of the Greek New Testament,” he wrote:

The next fact which impresses us in our investigation is the absence of the aorist and the presence of the present tense whenever the conditions of final salvation are stated. Our inference is that the conditions of ultimate salvation are continuous, extending through probation, and not completed in any one act. The great requirement is faith in Jesus Christ. A careful study of the Greek will convince the student that it is a great mistake to teach that a single act of faith furnishes a person with a paid-up, non-forfeitable policy, assuring the holder that he will inherit eternal life, or that a single energy of faith secures a through ticket for heaven, as is taught by the Plymouth Brethren, and by some popular lay evangelists. The Greek tenses show that faith is a state, a habit of mind, into which the believer enters at justification. . . .

John 1:12: But as many as received (aor.) Him . . . to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that are believing (present) perseveringly on His name. . . .

John 3:15: That whosoever is continuously believing in Him should not perish . . . but be having everlasting life. Here, again, the present . . . participle of the verb to believe is used, as it is again in verses 16 and 36.

John 5:24: Verily, verily I say unto you, he that is always hearing My word, and constantly believing on Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and is not coming into condemnation, but as passed over (perfect) from death unto life, and so continues. Says

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act of faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved (become converted). It is likewise the sense of Ephesians 1:13, “...after you believed (became converted), you were sealed with the Holy Spirit;” and Acts 4:32, “Those who had believed (became converted) were of one heart and soul.” This tense is used of the exercise of an act of faith to become converted, to secure healing, or with regard to some other particular purpose.

On the other hand, in every clear instance in the New Testament in which “believing” is said to produce eternal life or final salvation, the [Greek present] tense of continuing action is used: for example, John 3:16, “everyone who believes and continues to believe” (similarly John 3:15; 3:36; 5:24; 6:40; 11:26); John 20:31, “that by believing and continuing to believe you may have and continue to have life in his name”; John 3:18, “He who believes and continues to believe is not condemned; but he who does not believe and continues not to believe stands condemned already”; Romans 1:16, “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and continues to believe”; 1 John 5:13, “that you who believe and continue to believe on the name of the Son of God may know that you have eternal life”; 1 Timothy 1:16, “those who were to believe and continue to believe in him to eternal life.

. . . Since all of the *certain* examples associated with eternal life are passages which have the [present] tense of continuing action . . . the New Testament writers surely must have thought of eternal life as coming from a continuing faith. If one act of faith at conversion could bring “eternal security” without the necessity of continued faith, certainly somewhere the New Testament would have made that tremendously important fact clear! (Ibid., 11-12)

Alford: “So in 1 John 5:12, 13, the believing and the having eternal life are *commensurate*; where the faith is, the possession of eternal life is, and when the one remits, the other is forfeited. But here the faith is set before us as an *enduring* faith, and its effects described *in their completion*. (See Eph. 1:19, 20).” Thus this great English scholar rescues this text from its perverted use, to teach an eternal incorporation into Christ by a single act of faith, and he demonstrates the common-sense doctrine that the perseverance of the saints is grounded on persistent trust in Jesus Christ. . . .

John 6:29: . . . This is the work of God, that ye perseveringly believe [on Him whom He sent].

John 6:35: He that is perpetually coming (pres.) to Me shall not, by any means (double negative), once hunger (aor.) and he that is constantly believing in Me (emphatic) shall never, by any means, (double negative), feel one pang of thirst (aor.). . . .

John 6:54: Whoso eateth (pres., keeps eating) My flesh, and drinketh (keeps drinking) My blood, hath eternal life.

John 11:25, 26: he that believeth persistently (pres.) shall not, by any means (double negative), die (aor.) forever.

John 20:31: That ye might believe . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing constantly (pres.), ye might have life through His name. . . .

In Rom. 1:16, where future and eternal salvation is spoken of, it is promised to every one that perseveringly believes (pres.). So also in Rom. 3:22; 4:24; 9:33; 10:4, 11; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2:10, 13; 4:14. . . .

Hence we conclude from a thorough examination of the above texts, that the Spirit of inspiration has uniformly chosen the present tense in order to teach that final salvation depends on persevering faith.<sup>5</sup>

Nazarene scholar W. T. Purkiser and Reformed Arminian Stephen Ashby arrive at parallel conclusions. Purkiser writes:

The Bible is a Book of incredibly accurate detail. This is seen particularly in the care with which verb tenses are written. . . . This is especially true of the many references to saving faith found in the New Testament. Almost without exception they are in the present tense—referring to something begun at a given time and *now going on*. Many examples may be given. A few from John’s Gospel will suffice.

John 3:16, “That whosoever believeth [present tense, is believing] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth [present tense, is hearing] my word, and believeth [is believing] on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

John 6:35, “He that believeth [present tense, is believing] on me shall never thirst.”

John 11:26, “Whosoever liveth [is living] and believeth [is believing] in me shall never die.”

John 20:31, “But these were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

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<sup>5</sup> *Mile-stone Papers*, 47-52.

The doctrine of eternal security makes the mistake of ignoring God's present tenses and changes them to the past tense. . . . Jesus *did not say*, "If you *have trusted*." He said, "If you *are trusting*." . . . Properly speaking, a believer is one who now believes, not one who may at some time in the past have believed. Believing is a process, a continued action. . . . True security rests in the fact that saving faith is not a single historical act, but a present-tense, up-to-date, continuing process.<sup>6</sup>

Ashby writes:

Eternal securitists generally use a large number of proof texts that say that eternal life results from belief in Christ. We have already seen that Charles Stanley holds this to be a one-time, momentary act. On the contrary, however, almost all of these texts use the present tense when speaking of the belief that yields eternal life. Students of elementary Greek learn that the primary characteristic of the present tense is its linear nature, its progressive action. Though one could provide many examples, a few will suffice:

- John 3:15, "... that everyone who believes [present participle, is believing] may have eternal life in him" (cf. NIV text note).
- John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes [present participle, is believing] in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
- John 5:24: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears [present participle, is hearing] my word and believes [is believing] him who sent me has eternal life...."
- John 6:35: "... he who believes [present participle, is believing] in me will never be thirsty."
- John 6:40: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks [present participle, is looking] to the Son and believes [is believing] in him shall have eternal life."
- John 10:27-28: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life...." All the verbs used here are present indicatives and thus are best rendered as follows: "My sheep are listening to my voice; I am knowing them, and they are following me. I am giving them eternal life...."

It is not a small thing to change the scriptural emphasis from *believing as a process*, which is yielding eternal life, to *belief as a momentary act*, which one may walk away from one moment after believing with no adverse consequences.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Security: The False and the True*, 27-28, 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> *Four Views on Eternal Security*, "Reformed Arminianism," 164-65.

**“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe<sup>8</sup> in His name.” (John 1:12, NASB)**

**Believe on** [*pisteuousin eis*] The present participle, *believing*, indicates the present and continuous activity of faith. The word is used by John, sometimes with the dative case simply meaning to believe a person or thing; *i.e.*, to believe that they are true or speak the truth. Thus, to believe the *Scripture* (2:22); believe *me* (4:21); believe *Moses, his writings, my words* (4:46). At other times with a preposition, *eis, into*, which is rendered believe in, or believe on. So here, 6:29; 8:30; 1 John 5:10. See the two contrasted in 6:29, 30; 8:30, 31; 1 John 5:10. To believe in, or on, is more than mere acceptance of a statement. It is so to accept a statement or a person as to rest upon them, to trust them practically; to draw upon and avail one's self of all that is offered to him in them. Hence to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely to believe the facts of His historic life or of His saving energy as facts, but to accept Him as Savior, Teacher, Sympathizer, Judge; to rest the soul upon Him for present and future salvation, and to accept and adopt His precepts and example as binding upon the life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> B. F. Westcott: “The effective reception of Christ is explained to be the continuous energy of faith . . . . The faith is regarded as present and lasting ([the one believing]) . . .” (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 9). Frank Pack: “. . . The Greek text uses the present active participle, . . . pointing out not only the believers' original acceptance of Christ but also their continuing faith” (*The Gospel According to John*, 1:34). Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III: “[**pisteuousin**] pres[ent] act[ive] part[iciple]. . . . Part. w. the prep[osition] [*eis, in*] indicating an active commitment to a person. It is the acceptance of Jesus and what He claims to be as well as a committing of ones life to Him (Brown; M[oulton], 67-68)” (*The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 177). Donald C. Stamps:

This verse depicts clearly how saving faith is both the act of a single instant and an ongoing attitude of a lifetime. (1) to become a child of God, one must “receive” (Gk *elabon*, from *labanō*) Christ. . . . A definite act of faith. (2) Following the act of faith, there must be a continual action of believing. The word “believed” (Gk *pisteuousin*, from *pisteuō*) is a present participle, describing continued action and indicating the need for perseverance in believing. (*Life in the Spirit Study Bible*, 1599)

Matthew Vellanickal:

. . . [*pisteuousin, believing*] is a present participle. The ordinary signification of the present participle is a continuous action, without temporal specification. So the act of believing is conceived as something that is going on. . . . If v. 12a speaks of men as having received the Logos [Christ] at a definite time in the past, v. 12c describes them as continuing or persisting in that reception and belief” (Ibid., 138).

<sup>9</sup> Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 2:49-50.

**“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, the Son of Man must also be lifted up. So that everyone who believes can have<sup>10</sup> eternal life in him.” (John 3:14-15, NCV)**

The present tense [*ho pisteuōn*, the one believing] describes the person by its durative [continuing] action. . . . So we read, “may have in him life eternal,” i.e., in union or in connection with him. . . . The verb [*echē*, have] matches the durative [*pisteuōn*, believing]. The believer has life the moment he believes and as long as he believes; he is not compelled to wait until he enters heaven. . . . Nothing dead can give itself life, least of all that life which has its source in the Son of God himself. . . . And this life is “eternal,” . . . While its nature is “eternal” and deathlessness, it may be lost during our stay in this sinful world, but only by a willful and wicked cutting of the bond “in him,” a deliberate renunciation and destruction of faith.<sup>11</sup>

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes<sup>12</sup> in him shall not perish but have<sup>13</sup> eternal life.” (John 3:16, NIV)**

The most well-known verse in the entire Bible is undoubtedly John 3:16 . . . . Yet while it is well-known, it may well be the least understood. Most probably think this verse is expressing the need for a simple confession of faith in Jesus to receive eternal

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<sup>10</sup> A. T. Robertson writes that “have” (*echēi*) is a “present active subjunctive . . . that he may keep on having eternal life. . . . It is more than endless, for it is sharing in the life of God in Christ (5:26; 17:3; 1 John 5:12)” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5:49-50).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 257-58.

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen: “The present participle of this verb [believe] with the preposition *eis*, in . . . = *exercising living faith in the person of Christ*” (*New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 1:141, fn. 83). Paul T. Butler: “We must note that the promise of eternal life is to whosoever *continues* to believe in the Son. The word ‘believe’ is in the Greek present tense, and indicates continued action” (*The Gospel of John: A New Commentary, Workbook, Teaching Manual*, 112). J. Rodman Williams: “In Greek the present tense often means duration, thus the sense here would be ‘whoever believes, and keeps on believing’” (*Renewal Theology: Sin, Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living*, 2:129, fn. 41). J. Harold Greenlee:

. . . The words, *everyone who believes* refer to a *continuing* faith. . . . The Greek New Testament always speaks of eternal life as coming by continuing faith, not a single act of faith. So it is in John 3:16; not “everyone who has believed” at some past time, but “everyone who believes and keeps on believing.” (“John 3:16,” *Words from the Word*, 69)

Daniel B. Wallace:

Everyone who [continually] **believes** in him should not perish [John 3:16]  
. . . In this Gospel, there seems to be a qualitative distinction between the ongoing act of believing and the simple fact of believing. (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 522)

<sup>13</sup> Robert Picirilli: “. . . That everyone who *is believing* (present participle) may *be having* (present subjunctive) eternal life.’ One notes that the ‘having’ corresponds precisely with the ‘believing’” (*Grace, Faith, Free Will Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism*, 201)

life, that thus we believe *once* and have eternal life.

Virtually all commentators on John's Gospel, though, would agree that in keeping with the Greek present tense and John's theology, John 3:16 in fact means, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever *continues to believe* in him shall not perish but have eternal life."<sup>14</sup>

In the New Testament, when belief is said to lead to eternal life, as is the case here, the tense expressing continuous action is always used . . . . The stress is thus placed on continuous faith rather on an isolated moment of faith. . . . Thus never in these passages expressing belief in eternal life is one's eternal security said to be guaranteed by a single isolated act of faith.<sup>15</sup>

**"Whoever believes<sup>16</sup> in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe<sup>17</sup> stands condemned already, because he has not believed<sup>18</sup> in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:18, NIV)**

We should also note the tense action of the key verbs in the passage, especially in vv. 16, 18. In each instance, negative and positive, the verbs express on-going action (the Greek present participles and subjunctive). Everyone who *is believing* (vs. 16 *is having* eternal life (as also in v. 15). The one who *is believing* (v. 18) is not being (perhaps, "is not going to be") condemned, while the one who *is not believing* rests under a condemnation already established. Throughout, then, the continuing of a given state is co-extensive with the continuing of faith or unbelief. . . .

Surely this indicates the Scriptural approach to the doctrine of security of the believer. Clear, on the one hand, is the fact that faith, and faith alone, is the condition of salvation. Justification, first and finally, is not by works. But equally clear is the fact that continuing faith is the condition of final salvation (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5; Col. 1:23). Perseverance in salvation, like salvation itself, has faith for its condition.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Salvation Is More Complicated Than You Think: A Study on the Teachings of Jesus*, 165-66.

<sup>15</sup> George Allen Turner and Julius R. Mantey, *The Evangelical Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 99 and fn. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Tourville: "'Believeth' (*pisteuōn*) is a present participle and indicates continuous action. Those who keep on believing and trusting in Jesus are not condemned, are not under judgment" (*The Complete Biblical Library: John*, 5:73). Robert H. Mounce: "'Whoever believes [the present participle suggest a continuing relation of trust] is not condemned . . .'" (*The Expositors Bible Commentary: John*, Rev. ed., 10:401, brackets are his).

<sup>17</sup> Lenski: "'He that believes on him'—'he that believes not on him' [John 3:18] . . . Both substantivized participles are durative as in v. 15 and 16; continuous believing marking the one man, continuous non-believing the other. The whole world is divided into these two" (*Ibid.*, 267).

<sup>18</sup> Tourville: "'Hath not believed' (*pepisteuken*) is a perfect tense meaning they did not and still do not believe" (*Ibid.*, 5:73).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Picirilli, "Editor's Note: Doctrine in Jn. 3:16-18," in the *Randall House Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John*, 56.

**“The one who believes<sup>20</sup> in the Son has<sup>21</sup> eternal life, but the one who disobeys<sup>22</sup> the Son will not see life. Instead, the wrath of God remains on him.” (John 3:36, ISV)**

**He that believeth** (*ho pisteuōn*) stresses the continuing act of believing, not merely one who once believed. . . . **Obeded not** (*apeithōn*). This Greek verb was never used in first century Greek to mean “believe not” as it is translated in the KJV. Rather, it always had the meaning of disobedience. Philo in his book on “Drunkenness” used the verb again and again to denote disobedience of a son to his father. The fact that John used it as the opposite of “believe” suggests that to him saving faith in Christ also included obedience to Christ. The person that did not believe to the extent of *becoming* obedient was not born again and naturally did not have eternal life. The present participles for both believing and disobeying imply continuance in: not a single act of life, but rather a procedure in and a relationship to. Thus the one that ignores the mission and claims of Christ remains disobedient to him, and the wrath of God “remains on him.”<sup>23</sup>

**“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word, and believes him who sent me has<sup>24</sup> eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24, NIV)**

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<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris: “The present participle [for believes] indicates a continuing trust” (*The Gospel of According to John*, 248). B. F. Westcott: “*that believeth* with a faith which is continuous not momentary . . .” (Ibid., 62). Butler: “John used the present tense to denote that the one receiving eternal life is one who continually trusts and obeys. One who has an abiding faith has also an ever present assurance of eternal life” (Ibid., 124). Tourville: “The verb indicates the one who believes now has life now. It also indicates continuous action so that those who keep on believing keep on having eternal life. One who receives the gift of Jesus Christ receives eternal life. The gift and eternal life are inherently bonded together” (Ibid., 5:83). Pack: “The words translated **believes** (*pisteuōn*) and **does not obey** (*apeithōn*) are both present participles and express the continuing pattern of one’s life” (Ibid., 1:69). J. Carl Laney: “The one who believes (present tense, ‘continues to believe’) in the Son has eternal life as a present possession” (*Moody Gospel Commentary: John*, 87). Raymond Brown: “Notice the present tenses, ‘believes,’ ‘disobeys’; John is not thinking of a single act but of a pattern of life” (*The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible, 1:162).

<sup>21</sup> Mounce: “To believe in the Son is to *have* (. . . [*echei*] is present tense) eternal life, while rejection of the Son has already resulted in the wrath of God remaining (. . . [*menei*] is also present tense) on the unbeliever” (Ibid., 406). Andreas J. Köstenberger: “The present tense ‘has’ in the phrase ‘has eternal life’ indicates that eternal life is not merely a future expectation but already a present experience” (*John*, BECNT, 140).

<sup>22</sup> Morris: “The verb [for ‘disobeys’] is a present participle indicating a continuing attitude” (Ibid., 248).

<sup>23</sup> Turner and Mantey, Ibid., 102.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Alford: “**hath everlasting life**: so 1 John 5:12,13. The **believing** [*pisteuōn*], and the **having** [*echei*] **everlasting life**, are *commensurate*:—where the faith is, the possession of eternal life is:—and when the one remits, the other is forfeited. But here the faith is set before us as an enduring faith . . .” (*The New Testament for English Readers*, 508). Laney: “Jesus declares that those who hear His message and heed it, because they believe that God authorized Him (‘sent Me’) have (present tense) eternal life” (Ibid., 112).

The verbs *hear* and *believe* are both in the present tense, which indicates continuing to hear and believe. As long as they continue as believers, they have the assurance of not coming into condemnation or of perishing. Many other passages also have verbs in the present tense, indicating ongoing progressive action (John 3:16, 36; 6:54). The emphasis is not on belief as simply a momentary act, but on the process of believing.<sup>25</sup>

Those who teach the unconditional security of a person once regenerated often use, as an argument for their position, the strong *promises* that Bible makes to Christians. Many of these are contained in the Gospel of John, and John 5:24 is one of the outstanding examples: He that...believeth...hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life.

There are two important things about such a promise. First, and most important, if it is interpreted as a[n unconditional] guarantee that the believer's saving relationship to God can never change, then it proves too much! The problem is that the very same kind of promises are made to *unbelievers*! And if a promise of condemnation to unbelievers does not mean that an unbeliever cannot change his state and become a believer, then a promise of no condemnation to a believer also does not mean he can never change his state and become an unbeliever.

Consider John 3:36, for example, and put the two side by side:

<i>John 5:24</i> [KJV]	<i>John 3:36</i> [KJV]
He that believes . . .	He that believes not . . .
<i>shall not</i>	<i>shall not</i>
come into condemnation	see life

The grammar of the two is identical; [therefore] they must be interpreted in the same way. No one would say that 3:36 means one who is presently an unbeliever is forever doomed to that promised destiny. He can become a believer. All 3:36 means, then, is that the person who remains in the camp of unbelievers will inevitably share the destiny promised to unbelievers. Just so, all 5:24 means is that the person who remains in the camp of believers will inevitably share the destiny promised to believers.

Second, the tense-action of the verb believe sustains this understanding of the meaning. In this verse “believing” (a present tense participle) is in linear action—just as it usually is in the Gospel of John. The faith that saves is an ongoing faith, a continuing belief. We could appropriately render the verse thus: “The one who is believing has eternal life and shall not come into condemnation.” Certainly, the person who maintains faith will share the destiny promised believers. And the very same thing applies to 3:36 about unbelief.

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<sup>25</sup> French L. Arrington, *Unconditional Eternal Security: Myth or Truth?*, 63. Stamps:

The verbs “hears” (Gk *akouōn*, from *akouō*) and “believes” (Gk *pisteuōn*, from *pisteuō*) are present participles, emphasizing ongoing action (i.e., “whoever is hearing and believing”). Thus, the “hearing” and “believing” are not acts of a single moment, but actions that must continue. Christ affirms that our present possession of eternal life is conditional on a present living faith rather than on a momentary decision of faith sometime in the past. (Ibid., 1612)

“He that believeth not” (another present tense participle) is also linear in action. The one who persists in unbelief will share the destiny promised those who do not believe.<sup>26</sup>

**Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe<sup>27</sup> in the one he has sent.” (John 6:28-29, NIV)**

In John’s view faith is certainly used in a sense sufficiently comprehensive to include all that man can do, or is required to do, in appropriating the salvation which is offered in Christ. When, therefore, the disciples asked Jesus what they must do that they might work the works of God, his answer was: “This is the work of God,”—the sum of God’s requirement,—“that ye believe” (note the present [tense *hina pisteuēte*], “continue to believe . . . on him whom he hath sent” (6:28, 29). . . . As truly as the Christian life is with Paul a matter of faith all the way through (Rom. 1:17), so truly is it with John . . . a constant moral victory over the world through faith (1 John 5:1-4).<sup>28</sup>

**Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes<sup>29</sup> to me will never go hungry, and he who believes<sup>30</sup> in me will never be thirsty. . . . All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away [“cast out,” NASB].<sup>31</sup> (John 6:35, 37, NIV)**

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<sup>26</sup> “Editor’s Note on John 5:24: Do Promises to Believers Guarantee their Security?” *The Randall House Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John*, 85-86.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson: “Note the present active subjunctive *pisteuēte*, ‘that ye may keep on believing’” (Ibid., 5:105). Lenski: “The present subjunctive ‘that you believe’ means continuous believing . . .” (Ibid., 455). Morris: “. . . the present tense here denotes the continuing attitude . . .” (Ibid., 360). Westcott: “[believe] expresses not the single decisive act . . . but the continuous state of faith” (Ibid., 101). Turner and Mantey: “The use of the present tense here suggests that Jesus meant a trust in him for salvation that is more than an isolated act of faith. It is rather a life of faith . . . a life-time relationship” (Ibid., 160). C. K. Barrett: “The present (continuous) tense of [*pisteuēte*] is perhaps significant: not an *act* of faith, but a *life* of faith” (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 287). Kenneth Wuest: “This is the work of God, that you continually be believing on Him whom that One sent off on a mission” (*The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, 225).

<sup>28</sup> George B. Stevens, *The Johannine Theology: A Study of the Doctrinal Contents of the Gospel and Epistles of the Apostle John*, 228, 235.

<sup>29</sup> Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley: “Note again how Jesus put this in the present tense (signifying ongoing action): **He who comes** [or, keeps on coming] **to me will never go hungry, and he who believes** [or, keeps on believing] **in me will never be thirsty**” (*Opening John’s Gospel and Epistles*, 98). Turner and Mantey: “**He that cometh** and **he that believeth** are translations of present participles, denoting not a single act of coming or believing but a continuous coming and believing. Thus lifetime faith is implied” (Ibid., 161).

<sup>30</sup> Robertson: “He that believeth on me (*ho pisteuōn eis eme*). The continuous relation of trust after coming like *pisteuēte* (present tense) in verse 29” (Ibid., 5:107). Pack: “The present tense of *believe* expresses a continuing life of faith, not a single act of faith” (Ibid., 1:105).

<sup>31</sup> Turner and Mantey: “**I will in no wise cast out** (*ou mēe ekbalō exō*) uses a strong double negation, such as occurs twice in v. 35. Jesus thus emphasized that he would never forsake the *faithful* believer. It assures the sincere seeker a welcome ‘at the Father’s house’” (Ibid., 162-163).

Throughout this passage [John 6:35-45] an important truth is presented that again might be missed in many English translations. When Jesus describes the one who comes to Him and who believes in Him, He uses the present tense to describe this coming, believing, or, in other passages, hearing or seeing. The present tense refers to a *continuous, ongoing action*. . . . The wonderful promises that are provided by Christ are not for those who do not *truly* and *continually* believe. The faith that saves is a living faith, a faith that always looks to Christ as Lord and Savior. . . .

Many in our world today want us to believe that we can accept Christ simply as a Savior from sin, but not as Lord of our lives. They teach essentially that a person can perform an act of believing on Christ *once*, and after this, they can fall away even into total unbelief and yet still supposedly be “saved.” Christ does *not* call men in this way. Christ does not save men in this way. The true Christian is the one *continually* coming, *always* believing in Christ. Real Christian faith is an ongoing faith, not a one-time act. If one wishes to be eternally satiated, one meal is not enough. If we wish to feast on the bread of heaven, we must do so all our lives. We will never hunger or thirst if we *are always coming and always believing* in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

**“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes<sup>33</sup> in him shall have<sup>34</sup> eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40, NIV)**

. . . The Father’s will is that we behold the Son and believe in him. But only to this end: that we “shall have life eternal,” [zōē, life], the principle or very substance that constitutes life. Beholding and trusting in the Son puts us into true inward contact with him, and since he is the Bread of Life, or literally Life itself, this inner contact with him fills also us with life. His life enters our souls, and so we “have life.” The present subjunctive (3:15, 16) [echē] = “shall be having” from the instant of beholding and believing on and on forever.<sup>35</sup>

**“I tell you the truth, he who believes<sup>36</sup> [in me] has<sup>37</sup> everlasting life.” (John 6:47, NIV)**

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<sup>32</sup> James White, *Drawn by the Father*, 19-20.

<sup>33</sup> Turner and Mantey: “**Believeth** (*pisteuōn*; pres. act. part.) in the present tense denotes faith in Christ month after month and year after year” (Ibid., 163). Butler: “The Greek participles *theoron* and *pisteuon* (beholding and believing) are in the present tense and can only mean continuing action” (Ibid., 243). Beauford H. Bryant and Mark S. Krause: “The Greek text of verse 40 means literally, ‘the one looking and believing.’ Both of these actions are present participles, implying ongoing action” (*The College Press NIV Commentary: John*, 168).

<sup>34</sup> Robertson: “*Should have eternal life* (*echēi zōēn aiōnion*). Present active subjunctive with *hina*, ‘that he may keep on having eternal life’ as in 3:15, 36” (Ibid., 5:108).

<sup>35</sup> Lenski, Ibid., 471.

<sup>36</sup> Tourville: “‘He that believeth’ (*ho pisteuōn*) denotes the one who is believing. The present condition of believing is followed by the present possession of ‘everlasting life.’ . . . He did not say he who ‘believed’ but *is* ‘believing.’ It is not sufficient to have trusted and committed at a time in the past. The experience must be a present practice” (Ibid., 5:173, 175). Lenski: “He [the person marked by faith], and he alone, ‘has life eternal,’ as already explained in v. 40. The [present] participle also has the force that this person has life eternal from the instant of his believing onward and as long as he believes. . . . It is believing or trusting that joins him to Jesus and thus to life eternal” (Ibid., 479).

Here the participle [for *believes*] is used as a substantive. The one who continues believing continues having eternal life. Faith *in* and faithfulness *to* are inherent in the noun (*pistis*) and the verb (*pisteuō*). A good example of what John meant by believing is given in John 3:36, when, after saying belief brings eternal life, he states that disobedience to the Son brings on the wrath of God. Thus, if one's faith is not deep and permanent enough to result in obedience it does not bring eternal life. If there is a new nature it will express itself in faithfulness and obedience to God.<sup>38</sup>

The present tense of the participle “he who believes” (*ho pisteuōn*) stresses the continuing necessity of faith. Faith is not a onetime event that covers all exigencies of the future but an ongoing trust in God that transforms the life and conduct of the believer in the here and now. Everlasting life belongs to those who are allowing faith to become the controlling factor of their existence.<sup>39</sup>

**“Whoever eats<sup>40</sup> my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks<sup>41</sup> my blood remains<sup>42</sup> [“abides,” NASB] in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so**

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<sup>37</sup> Rogers and Rogers: “[**echei**, has] pres. act. part. . . . Pres. [tense] indicates continual possession” (Ibid., 198).

<sup>38</sup> Turner and Mantey, Ibid., 164.

<sup>39</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: The Gospel of John*, 10:447.

<sup>40</sup> Robertson: “Present active participle for continual or habitual eating like *pisteuete* in verse 29” (Ibid., 5:111). Morris: “The present [tense verb for ‘the one eating’], points to a continuing appropriation” (Ibid., 379, fn. 130). Westcott: “the tense . . . marks an action which must be continuous and not completed once for all” (Ibid., 107). Tourville: “‘Whoso eateth (*ho trōgōn*) my flesh’ is a present participle meaning a habitual eating” (Ibid., 5:177, 179). Merrill C. Tenney: “The present tense of [“eats” in verse 54 and 56] . . . refers to progressive action that applies to the maintenance of a continuing state” (*Expositor's Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John*, 9:78). Thomas O. Summers (1812-1882): “The present tense is used to express a constant living by faith” (*Commentary on the Gospels*, 4:107).

<sup>41</sup> Laney: “The present tense of verbs ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ point to a continuing appropriation” (Ibid., 132). Wuest: “He who keeps on eating my flesh and drinking my blood, in me is continually abiding and I in him.” (Ibid., 226-27). Pack: “**Eats** and **drinks** translate present participles which emphasize continuing action; this same action is represented in **abide**” (Ibid., 1:113). Mounce: “Note here that the eating and drinking is put in the present tense, which stresses its continuing quality. Those who make it a practice of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus sustain that personal relationship” (Ibid., 10:450). Herman Ridderbos: “For this ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ are not a one-time event but a repeated activity of faith. . . . As is also evident from present tense *ὁ τρώων* [the one eating] . . . *καὶ πίνων* [and drinking] in vss. 54, 55, 57, 58” (*The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, 243 and fn. 165).

<sup>42</sup> Laney: “The present tense of ‘remains’ (*menō*) suggests a continuous relationship (cf. John 1:32-33; 14:10). The focus of this term is on the union of the believer with Christ. The relationship between Christ and the believer is depicted as a spiritual union involving a continuous, mutual indwelling” (Ibid., 132). Rogers and Rogers: [**menei**, abide] pres. ind[icative] . . . Pres. [tense] indicates a continual abiding” (Ibid., 198).

**the one who feeds<sup>43</sup> [“eats,” NASB] on me will live because of me.” (John 6:53-57, NIV)**

We may read [*ho trōgōn kai pinōn*, the one eating and drinking] like [*ho pisteuōn*, the one believing] with regard to a quality conveyed by continuous action: eating and drinking and going on in these actions. . . . If the point of comparison is asked for, it is simply that eating and drinking, like believing, is a receiving of the most intimate and vital kind. As eating and drinking receive food to be assimilated in the body, so believing receives Christ with the atonement made through his sacrificial flesh and blood. But the figure is less than the reality, for bodily eating only sustains life already present while spiritual eating or believing expels death, bestows life, and sustains that life forever. . . . To eat and drink means to be spiritually joined to Jesus, the Son of man. . . . By this gift from him and its reception in us he and we are joined inwardly: [*en emoi*, in me . . . *en autō*, in him]. As long as we remain apart from Jesus and inwardly separated from him we are in spiritual death; the moment we are inwardly joined to him we are freed from this death and have life eternal.

This effect of faith is usually termed the *unio mystica*, or mystical union of the believer with Christ. It is pictured as an indwelling [*menei*, abides] . . . Both expressions “in us” and “in him” designate our benefit and ours alone; both denote our salvation. When it is said that he abides in us, he is our life, light, joy, pearl of great price, peace, crown. “He in me, and I in him” = 1) Jesus the life element in which we live and move and have our being spiritually; 2) Jesus the life center, preserving, molding the spiritual life within us. . . . Our living is conditional on our receiving Jesus . . . .<sup>44</sup>

**On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes<sup>45</sup> in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” (John 7:37-38, NIV)<sup>46</sup>**

Jesus offered eternal quenching of spiritual thirst to all who accepted him as the true Messiah. The expression, “he that believeth,” is a translation of a present participle (*pisteuōn*) and denotes a continued relationship of trust in Christ.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Butler: “It is well to note here that the *trogon* (the one eating) is in the present tense and must be translated ‘the one continuing to eat me . . .’ etc. Assimilation of the Bread of Life must be continuous” (Ibid., 251).

<sup>44</sup> Lenski, Ibid., 493, 494, 496-97, 501.

<sup>45</sup> Lenski: “The present substantivized participle [*ho pisteuōn*, the one believing] characterizes the person as one who continues trusting in Jesus” (Ibid., 576). Tourville: “The ‘he that believeth’ (*ho pisteuōn*) is a present tense participle signifying a continuing act of believing here and now” (Ibid., 5:211).

<sup>46</sup> Charles B. Williams: “Whoever continues to believe in me will have, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water continuously flowing from within him” (*The New Testament in the Language of the People*).

<sup>47</sup> Turner and Mantey, Ibid., 182.

**Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows<sup>48</sup> Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” (John 8:12, NIV)<sup>49</sup>**

The present participle in Greek, **he that follows me**, implies a continuance in following (*akolouthon*). The use of the double negative (*ou me*) makes very emphatic the statement: **“he will never walk in darkness but he will have the light of life.”** In other words, Christ will always bring light into his life and never at any time permit darkness to overwhelm him.<sup>50</sup>

**“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me.<sup>51</sup> I give<sup>52</sup> them eternal life, and they shall never perish;<sup>53</sup> no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out my Father’s hand.” (John 10:27-29, NIV)**

**My sheep hear** (obey) . . . **and follow me**. Both verbs in Greek are in the present tense and therefore denote continued action. . . . In ancient times herds of sheep were usually small, and they followed the shepherd wherever he went. There is no difficulty in believing in the “eternal security” of believers *if* they are consistent in obeying and following Christ. . . .

The **eternal life** which Jesus gives to his “sheep” is something of which no combination of outward circumstances can deprive them. It is in line with Paul’s ringing and triumphant challenge—“What shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35-39). This is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the fact that the Good Shepherd

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<sup>48</sup> Barrett: “[*akolouthon*, follows] expresses the obedience of faith” (Ibid., 337). Morris: “We should not overlook the present participle with the idea of a continual following” (Ibid., 438). Stamps: “‘Whoever’ follows me’ is a present participle, picturing a continuing action—‘whoever keeps on following’” (Ibid., 1619).

<sup>49</sup> Williams: “I am the light of the world. Whoever continues to follow me need never walk in darkness, but he will enjoy the light that means life.”

<sup>50</sup> Turner and Mantey, Ibid., 191.

<sup>51</sup> Tourville: “The three verbs of this verse are in the present tense denoting continuous action: ‘hear,’ ‘know,’ and ‘follow’” (Ibid., 5:297). Rogers and Rogers: “[*akolouthēō*] to follow, here in the sense of obey. Pres. tenses here are customary or habitual. This is the expected action of the sheep” (Ibid., 207). Mounce: “Three things are true of Jesus’ flock: they listen to his voice, they are known by him, and they habitually follow (present tense) him” (Ibid., 10:507).

<sup>52</sup> Vincent: “Not, *I will give*. The gift is present and continuous” (Ibid., 2:196).

<sup>53</sup> Purkiser:

He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” . . . These are all present-tense statements. “They are hearing My voice” “They are following Me”; “I am giving [them] eternal life”; those who are doing so “shall never perish.” There is nothing in this scripture, or anywhere else in the Bible, to give false confidence to any who are not now following the Lord, whatever their past might have been. . . . No one is authorized to rewrite this passage to read, “They once heard My voice and followed Me, and I give unto them eternal life.” (Ibid., 9-10)

is faithful to his task and, unlike the hireling, remains to protect the flock from danger (vv. 11-14). This does not, of course, mean an unconditional “eternal security.” But it does mean that “eternal security” is a glorious reality to that believer who abides in Christ. . . . The eternal life is not only something promised for the future; the present tense indicates that the giving is present and continuous.<sup>54</sup>

Eternal life is the life of those who continue to follow Jesus. No one can retain eternal life who turns away from Jesus. John 10:28 is frequently used as a security blanket by those who ignore many of the New Testament warnings about going back or falling away, . . . all of the sentence, hardly needs explanation, for it is a promise to those who continue to follow Jesus. Not for one moment do I doubt this literal translation: “My sheep keep on hearing my voice, and I keep on knowing them, and they keep on following me: and I keep on giving them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” Some read the passage as if it says: “My sheep heard my voice, and I knew them, and they followed me, and I gave to them eternal life.” [But] The verbs are present linear, indicating continuous action by the sheep and by the Shepherd. . . .<sup>55</sup>

Believers are assured of divine care and protection, but does such assurance mean “once saved, always saved”? *First observe that supporters of the teaching of unconditional security often appeal to John 10:27,28: “My Sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”* These verses appear to teach unconditional security in salvation, but before assuming a blanket guarantee that no believer can go back and fall away, we need to give these verses their full value. A number of the verbs are present tense, implying continuous, ongoing action and can be translated: “My sheep keep on hearing My voice, and I keep on knowing them, and they keep on following Me, and I keep on giving them eternal life. . . .”

Those who continue to hear the Good Shepherd’s voice and who continue following Him are the ones who can never perish or be snatched out of God’s hand. It is these He is giving eternal life; but if a believer ceases to follow Christ and becomes an unbeliever, his spiritual condition changes and he forfeits the gift of eternal life.<sup>56</sup>

**Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26, NIV)<sup>57</sup>**

The possession [of eternal life] is obtained by connection with Jesus. The connection is spiritual, by the confidence and trust in the soul which clings to Jesus who is all that he says. The present participles [living and believing] are durative qualifications . . . It is

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<sup>54</sup> Turner and Mantey, *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>55</sup> Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 357-58.

<sup>56</sup> Arrington, *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Williams: “I am the resurrection and the life myself. Whoever continues to believe in me will live right on, even though he dies, and no person who continues to live and believe in me will ever die at all.”

impossible that any believer should ever, . . . until the end of the Messianic eon, lose what Jesus here guarantees. Only by turning from faith are these promises lost.<sup>58</sup>

**But these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing<sup>59</sup> you may have life in his name. (John 20:31, NIV)**

Most likely, John wrote this Gospel to encourage those who already believed to continue in their faith. This can be inferred because John used the present tense for the subjunctive very *pisteuō*, rather than the aorist (according to the best manuscript evidence).<sup>60</sup> The present tense verb suggests ongoing faith, a believing that extends beyond the initial act of faith. Indeed, the next expression “through believing you may have life in his name” also has two present tense verbs: *believing* (a present participle) and *may have life* (a present subjunctive verb). John was emphasizing ongoing faith and continual appropriation of Jesus’ life. We know that the early Christians were the recipients of the written Gospels; the apostles wrote the Gospels to affirm what they had believed via the oral teachings (see Luke 1:1-4). As such, John’s Gospel was written to the community of believers. This does not mean, however, that the Gospel was not intended to go beyond this community. Indeed, history has shown that John’s Gospel has been a powerful tool for evangelism. The gospel message not only sustains faith, it creates it anew.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lenski, *Ibid.*, 802-3.

<sup>59</sup> Robertson: “Note the present participle *pisteuontes* (continuing to believe) and the present active subjunctive *echēte* (keep on having)” (*Ibid.*, 5:317). Butler: “It is worthy of note that John uses the present tense of the verb *pisteuo* (believe) and so literally it means to believe and keep on believing” (*Ibid.*, 437). Lenski: “The second [*hina*, that] clause has the durative presents [*pisteuontes*, believing and *echēte*, may be having]. John’s purpose in writing what he does is [*hina pisteuontes*], ‘that you may be believing,’ i.e., now and forever” (*Ibid.*, 1396). Turner and Mantey: “*Hina pisteuontes* (‘in order that by believing’) instrumental use of the present participle. Again the use of the present tense denotes continuance in believing, not just an initial or merely temporary faith. *Echēte* — you may continue having (pres. subj.) [life]” (*Ibid.*, 400-1).

<sup>60</sup> Comfort and Hawley’s Endnotes read: “The earliest manuscripts (P66<sup>vid</sup> ⋈ \* B) read, ‘continue to believe,’ while later manuscripts (⋈<sup>2</sup> A C D W) read, ‘believe’ (*Ibid.*, 256).

<sup>61</sup> Comfort and Hawley, *Ibid.*, 256.

**Anyone who believes<sup>62</sup> in the Son of God has this testimony [“witness,” KJV] in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is<sup>63</sup> in his Son. He who has<sup>64</sup> the Son has life;<sup>65</sup> he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.<sup>66</sup> I write**

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<sup>62</sup> Stephen Smalley notes that the verb “believe” found in John 5:1, 5, 10, and 13, is in the “present tense, . . . literally, ‘believing,’ [which] suggests the need for continuous faith” and “implies *maintaining* the faith . . .” (*Word Biblical Commentary: 1,2,3 John*, 266, 276). D. Edmond Hiebert: “The articular participle, ‘the one who believes’ (*[ho pisteuōn]*) portrays the individual as exercising a continuing faith centered on the Son of God” (“An Exposition of 1 John 5:1-12,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* [Apr-Jun] 1990: 228). Robert W. Yarbrough:

The dynamic nature of the believing that John promotes is implied by his very word choice: the noun “faith” occurs only one time in John’s Gospel and John’s Epistles (1 John 5:4). But verbal forms connoting the action of believing occur some 107 times in the same corpus, and about 82 of these are in the present [tense] form, which tends to suggest an ongoing (as opposed to a static or once-and-done-with) response. (*1, 2, 3, John*, BECNT, 288)

<sup>63</sup> Smalley: “John claims that eternal life is (constantly; [*estin*] ‘is,’ occurs in the present tense) to be found ‘in God’s Son’ . . .” (*Ibid.*, 288).

<sup>64</sup> Rogers and Rogers: “[*echō*] to have, to possess. Pres[ent tense] of the vb. indicates continual possession M[oulton], 110)” (*Ibid.*, 599).

<sup>65</sup> Hiebert: “The present tenses mark this possession of life as a present reality. It is only through this close and living union between Christ and the believer that eternal life can be experienced” (*Ibid.*, 230). Smalley:

It has already been maintained (vv 10-11) that to believe in Jesus, and thus possess the witness of God to his life-giving Son, is to experience “eternal life.” Keeping faith in this way means “possessing” Christ himself, as well as the “life” which he brings. A close and constant relationship is established between Christ and the Christian, through which the divine life can be experienced. . . . Moreover, that “life” is constantly shared *now* (*[echōn, possesses, and echei, has]* are in the present tense), as well as eternally (cf. Stott, 183). Note similarly the present tenses in v 11. (*Ibid.*, 288)

<sup>66</sup> Smalley: “As in vv 11 and 13 John’s theology includes an exclusive note. It is *only* through Jesus Christ that God’s life may be shared by believers. . . . A practical call to decision is also implicit. Life-giving faith is possible, and therefore it should be exercised and maintained!” (*Ibid.*, 289)

**these things to you who believe<sup>67</sup> in the name<sup>68</sup> of the Son of God so that you may know that you have<sup>69</sup> eternal life. (1 John 5:10-13, NIV)**

John's stated purpose in writing is "in order that you may know that you have eternal life." The verb "know" . . . denotes a "knowledge that is characterized by assurance, something known with certainty." His aim was to strengthen and deepen the assurance they already had. . . . The content of this assured knowledge is "that you have eternal life" (*[hina zōēn echete aiōnion]*), literally, "that life ye are having eternal"). Placing the adjective "eternal" at the end of the clause emphasizes the nature of that life, "life that is endless (as to time) and life that is God-breathed (as to quality)." The present tense verb asserts that the readers already are in possession of this life. . . . The present tense articular participle (*[tois pisteuousin]*, "to those believing") designates a definite group characterized by a living faith uniting them with the Son of God. This faith assures them of eternal life and marks the sharp antithesis between them and the anti-Christian heretics. This 10th and last occurrence of the verb "believe" in this epistle again shows that an active faith is foundational to true Christianity.<sup>70</sup>

Marianne Meye Thompson's final thoughts in her article, *Eternal life in the Gospel of John*, serve as a fitting conclusion to what has previous been said by a variety of commentators:

First, eternal life is not relegated to the future, although the believer has hope for the future in the shape of the resurrection. Eternal life is present now insofar as through Christ an intimate relationship with and knowledge of God the Father is made available. In that relationship the believer acknowledges dependence upon God who is the source of all life. And in being faithful to that living God, the believer may be said to "have life." The believer does not have life "in himself," as does the Son. The Son's life is unmediated. But the believer has life in a continuing and dynamic relationship with God, through the mediation of the Son.

Thus those who have life have it only and insofar as they depend upon the source of all life. . . . For from God, and only from God, who alone can give life, does life come to the believer in every form in which it comes. For this reason, commentators prefer to speak of the reality of eternal life in active and dynamic terms. Lindars, for example, writes that

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<sup>67</sup> Smalley: "The present tense of [*pisteuousin*] ('believe') suggests an ongoing faith in Jesus" (Ibid., 291). Alexander Ross: "This faith must be always in exercise—'he that *believeth*': we have a present tense with similar significance in Jn. 1:12" (*The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle of James and John*, 217). Yarbrough: "John's assurance is for those who 'are believing'" (Ibid., 297).

<sup>68</sup> Yarbrough: "The name is tantamount to the fullness of his being, work, and word. To believe in that name means 'total surrender in faith' (Strecker 1996: 200n10)" (Ibid., 297).

<sup>69</sup> Smalley: "Believers can be sure of possessing eternal life . . . and therefore they *must* be certain. Theirs is a contemporary and ongoing assurance (*[echete]*, 'you possess,' is in the present tense; cf. *[echōn]*, 'possesses,' in v 12)" (Ibid., 290).

<sup>70</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of 1 John 5:13-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept) 1990: 312.

John prefers to say that believers “live,” rather than to say they are “saved.” Manson speaks of life as vitality, and Barrett as “essential energy.” These are merely modern paraphrases of the allegory of the vine and the branches in John 15, where it becomes clear that life is not some discrete thing, but the dependence of the branch upon the vine. . . .

In summary, “life” is a term which connotes the totality of salvation. No more encompassing term could be imagined. . . . if one insists on understanding life as something one can get, something apart from the Giver of life, one does not fully understand life. Perhaps one ancient writer said it well when he wrote, “And is it not life eternal to take refuge with Him that is, and death to flee away from Him?”<sup>71</sup>

Those who hold that one moment of faith secures one’s eternal destiny have the burden of proof to overturn the evidence brought forth from respected scholars such as Gerald Hawthorne, J. Harold Greenlee, Daniel Wallace, Marvin Vincent, Richard Lenski, A. T. Robertson, George Allen Turner, Julius R. Mantey, B. F. Westcott, Robert Mounce, Robert Picirilli, Stephen Smalley, Philip Comfort, and etc. I am confident that more scholars could be assembled who would assert that a person must continue believing in Christ in order to keep on possessing eternal life from him. Indeed, “is not life eternal to take refuge with Him . . . and death to flee away from Him?”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989): 50-52. After looking closely at the use of *believe* in John 1:12; 6:29; 35; 40; 47; 54; and 14:1, Gerald Hawthorne concluded,

Faith to John was not static or passive, but was dynamic and active, reaching out to appropriate and make the object of faith one’s own. There was in it, too, an element of dependency, a recognition of the absolute need for the object, with a consequent willingness to come to that object. It appears, also, to be more than mere belief about or recognition of the true value of the object, more than mental apprehension of it. There seems also to have been a definite concept of committal to that object—that one step beyond perception. This idea is further developed in the preposition characteristic of John’s favorite construction—the preposition [*eis*, in]. “it would seem,” writes Professor Moulton, “as if the substitution of [*eis*, in] or [*epi*, on] for the simple dative may have obtained currency mainly in Christian circles where the importance of the difference between mere belief and personal trust was keenly realized” (*Prolegomena*, 68). Faith, then, in its highest and noblest sense was to John a vital appropriation of, dependency upon, and committal to the object of its activity. (*Ibid.*, 122)

<sup>72</sup> This paper was completed in December 2009, by Steve Witzki.

## Saving Faith According to the Apostle Paul

Here are two of the most well known passages from the writings of Paul to add to this study on saving faith. It is clear that Paul agrees with Jesus and the writer John in seeing saving faith as an attitude of a life.

**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:<sup>73</sup> first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Romans 1:16, NIV)**

. . . “to all who believe.” Here as in other similar references to believers Paul uses the present rather than the aorist tense (3:22; 4:5, 11, 24; 9:33; 10:4, 10-11; 15:13; 1 Cor 1:21; 14:22; 2 Cor 4:13; Gal 3:22; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10, 13; also Eph 1:19; aorist in 2 Thess 1:10). . . . In such passages he wishes to focus not solely on the initial act of faith but on faith as a continuing orientation and motivation for life. . . . Faith is both the initial and the continuing access point for the saving power of God into human life . . . .<sup>74</sup>

. . . Faith is the only *means* and the key condition for salvation. It is not only necessary in the beginning for the very reception of salvation (Col 2:12), but is also necessary as an ongoing state of mind that continues to cling to and rest upon the gospel promises throughout the Christian life. This may be why Paul says the gospel is God’s power unto salvation for “everyone who *believes*” (present tense). The present tense of the verb implies ongoing action, “a continuing orientation and motivation for life” (Dunn, 1:40).<sup>75</sup>

Who then can He save? “Everyone that believeth.” Two or three important things need to be noted about this. First, any person is a potential candidate for salvation. . . . Second, faith (belief) is the one supreme condition man must meet. This is the only thing that makes the difference between those whom God saves and those whom he does not. Third, that faith is not one mere act of intellectual assent but a continuing and obedient trust in God through Christ. In Greek the word “believeth” is in the tense that involves continuing action.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Vic Reasoner: “The faith which saves is a present tense faith; πιστεύω (*pisteuo*) is a present active participle denoting continuous action (v 16). (*A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Romans*, 46). Robert H. Mounce: “That πιστεύοντι [believing] is present tense rather than aorist suggests that Paul wanted to stress that the faith that saves is not simply the initial act of trust but a continuing reliance upon the redemptive work of God” (*The New American Commentary: Romans*, 71 fn. 45).

<sup>74</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans*, 1:39-40. Later he explains: “This is the point of the present tense—‘to all who believe and go on believing’; namely, to all who not only come to a decision of faith, but whose whole life is characterized as a trustful acceptance of and commitment to the gospel which is God’s power to salvation” (Ibid., 1:47).

<sup>75</sup> Jack Cottrell, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Romans*, 1:114-15.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Picirilli, *The Book of Romans*, 15.

**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,<sup>77</sup> but to us who are being saved<sup>78</sup> it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe<sup>79</sup>. (1 Corinthians 1:21, NIV)**

We must not overlook the fact that the application of His work is conditional: “to save them that believe” (v. 21). The verb believe (Greek present participle *pisteuon*) is progressive action: “those who are believing.” This is nearly always the case when believing is stated to be the condition for salvation. Continuing faith is the condition for continuing in salvation.<sup>80</sup>

God, however, knows that human wisdom could not know Him. Therefore, in His wisdom, He was pleased to use the preaching of what the world called foolishness in order to save those who believe. The present active participle in the Greek indicates that they keep on believing and their faith keeps on appropriating salvation. It is not enough to have believed once. The preaching of the Cross, along with the declaration that the crucified and resurrected Jesus is Lord and Savior, is still the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, that is, who keeps on believing and obeying the gospel (Rom. 1:16).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Robert E. Picirilli: “‘Those who are perishing’ (the Greek verb is linear action) are those who stand under the destructive judgment of God . . .” (*The Randall House Bible Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, 20).

<sup>78</sup> Picirilli: “In direct contrast with ‘those who are perishing’ is to ‘those who are being saved.’ The verb, too, is linear . . .” (*Ibid.*, 21). Paul T. Butler: “The Greek prepositions *apollumenois* (perishing) and *sozomenois* (being saved) are present tense, denoting a continuing action” (*Studies in 1 Corinthians*, 22)

<sup>79</sup> Butler: “Paul uses the Greek present tense when he writes the word believe (Gr. *pisteuontas*) indicating that those who are being saved (see comments, v. 18) are those who are continuing to believe” (*Studies in 1 Corinthians*, 24-25). R. C. H. Lenski: “But note well: ‘to save the believing.’ . . . The present participle characterizes the persons: such as believe and go on believing or trusting the glad news” (*The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 63). Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer: **τοὺς πιστεύοντας**. [the ones believing] . . . The habit of faith (pres. part.), and not cleverness, is the power by which salvation is appropriated (Rom. 1:17, 3:25). He does not say **τοὺς πιστεύσαντα** [the ones having believed], which might mean that to have once believed was enough” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 21). David E. Garland: “The phrase ‘those who believe’ (. . . *tous pisteuontas*) is again in the present tense, which implies continuing trust” (*1 Corinthians*, BECNT, 68). Ben Witherington III: “Paul speaks in v. 18 of being saved—an ongoing process—and in v. 21 of believing—again an ongoing process. The Corinthians apparently tended to think that they already had it all. Paul keeps stressing by various means that this is not the case” (*Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 112). Leon Morris: “Men do not receive salvation by exercising wisdom. It comes to *them that believe* (the tense is present continuous, indicating a habitual faith)” (*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians*, 45).

<sup>80</sup> Robert E. Picirilli, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Stanley M. Horton, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 28 and fn. 15.