

Issues of Faith

Notes on faith- Not faith? Spurious faith? Different faith?

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Faith is a key component in Christian living.¹ We live in the dispensation² of the grace from God (Eph. 3:2) and we live by grace as we live by faith, so Paul calls this dispensation “the one in/by faith” (1 Tim. 1:4). God has made us many promises related to His grace, and we live by believing those promises. However, many believers have a faulty understanding of the nature of faith and believing. Such faults affect the way we live.

Faith and believe are the noun and verb translations respectively of a single word family. *Faith* is *pistis* [πίστις] and *believe* is *pisteuō* [πιστεύω]. A Christian can live the Christian life without a full understanding of faith, but a more accurate understanding of these terms and what God means both eliminates problems due to errors and opens for him new possibilities.

Many are the errors related to the idea of faith. They range from big errors such as Pentecostal faith movements which admit very little Biblical constraints on faith, to minor errors regarding its definition: it means trust, right? The word has a range of meanings, and a Biblical definition. Discerning both will help us avoid extremes when explaining these words. We need to discern the object of faith and this relates in part to distinguishing faith exercised by the sinner and faith exercised by one who is saved. Both are faith, but confusing the two results in problems. Many Evangelical commentators judge some Scriptural references to faith as spurious faith or only mental assent to some fact. Commentators draw this conclusion because those said to believe appear to give contrary evidence. Such conclusions have significance especially in John who uses the verb *believe* nearly one hundred times. Few distinguish Old Testament faith exercised during Christ’s earthly ministry from faith today. Faith in the Christian life is Spirit-produced. Old Testament faith, at least at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry was the response of those drawn by the Father. This distinction also involves the relation of faith to signs and miracles.

The words *believe* and *faith* occur with at least three prepositions in the New Testament: *eis*, *en*, *epi*. The verb *believe* seems to have its object in nouns in the accusative case, but many passages

¹ Speakers in this forum have written several papers over the years: Roy McPherson, [Are Unbelievers Unbeliever](#) [2001]; Mark Konrad, [Size Aspects of Faith](#) [1999]; and myself [The Faith](#) [2014]. This demonstrates the importance of this topic and the need to revisit our conclusions. I think many would agree with me that continued study sometimes results in new conclusions missed in our previous considerations or even a change as a clearer understanding alters previous conclusions. [The Faith](#) may be downloaded at Graceteaching.com.

² A dispensation [ὄκονομία] is a house rule, or principle by which God governs a household consisting of some or all of mankind, and by which He makes available to them certain benefits. A dispensation is not a way of initial salvation ever! The present dispensation of grace is not about how we are initially saved but about how we live.

also appear to have as the object nouns in the LID³ case form. We cannot account for these differences by the various styles of the human authors, as John uses believe with *eis* and the accusative 32 times and with the LID form 15 times. Our English Bibles often represent both constructions by the same translation. So the NASB has “believe in” where “in” translates *eis*, *epi*, and *en* respectively in Matthew 18:6; 27:2; and Mark 1:15. Is this a legitimate translation? I am of the opinion that recognition and translation of these prepositions which reflects the distinct grammar yields a better understanding of what God means in each statement.

My goal is to briefly review the Biblical definition of faith. I then plan to examine whether this definition applies also to the verb believe. From this information, I will attempt to address the uses of the verb *pisteuō* and its relationship to substantives and prepositions. I will consider the relationship of faith in the gospels to signs and miracles. I will conclude by examining select texts considering whether it is appropriate to describe some occurrences of faith as spurious or only mental assent. This will help to better understand certain abused texts regarding faith.

On the definition of faith

Many words have a breadth of meaning. The scholastic linguistic designation is semantic range, or the range of meanings a given word can or does signify. In English “race” can designate something one runs, a channel which confines a bearing’s movement, a genetic and ethnic people group, or a ginger root. Four possibilities represented by one word. The Hebrew and Greek terms *ruach* [רוּחַ] and *pneuma* [πνεῦμα] can refer to wind, breath, God as spirit, the Holy Spirit, spirit beings and man’s spirit essence. All these are spirit in some sense. Some words have a literal and metaphorical range such as the New Testament word *peripateō* [περιπατέω] which can refer to the physical activity of walking or metaphorically to how one lives life. The student of Scripture must always pay attention to context to discern the intended meaning of a word including its grammatical information: tense, mood, case. A word’s relation to other words in a clause, sentence, paragraph, and the larger idea being addressed all form the context which affects word meaning.

Our New Testament word “believe” translates the Greek verb *pisteuō* [πιστεύω]. Jesus and the New Testament writers use it to represent the Hebrew *aman* [אָמַן] (e.g. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). The Greek verb involved the idea of confidence or trust which rests on something convincing or sure. For the Greek, visual proofs could support faith. However, the Holy Spirit refined the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1. He modified the definition by eliminating “proofs” or that which can be seen. Therefore, when we as New Testament believers speak of faith we are confronted with something different than the non-Christian Greek-speakers would have understood or, and this is more important to the interpreter, different than faith prior to the cross. If we can see it, we don’t hope for it, and we do not need faith (Rom. 8:24-25). Because the noun faith is modified, this modification also applies to the corresponding verb believe.

This new definition of faith means that faith or believing in the context of the Old Testament,

³ LID is an abbreviation for three cases which share one form: locative-location, instrumental-means, dative-indirect object.

which includes the gospels, was different. At the end of the nineteenth century, the theologian and philologist Adolf Deissman observed regarding Paul's use of *pistis*, "In reality, however, his idea of faith is altogether new: no one would think of identifying the πίστις of the LXX with the πίστις of Paul."⁴ But in the gospels, people saw Jesus' signs and believed (Jh. 2:23). When the royal official asked Jesus to come heal his son, Jesus responded, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." (Jh. 4:48). Jesus used the plural form of "you"⁵, though He was speaking to this one man. As He encountered people, one sign was never enough. The crowds who had eaten the day before demonstrate this by asking for another sign of food the next day "that we may see, and believe" (6:30). They took an interest in Jesus because they saw signs (6:2), but Jesus knew they did not believe and it wasn't the sign for which they were seeking Him but the food they ate (6:26). Though He did many signs the people didn't believe (12:37). The scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign (Matt. 12:38-39; 16:1-4). Even Jesus' disciples saw signs and believed (Jh. 2:11). After He was raised, His disciples believed again (2:22). John and Peter came to the tomb and believed (20:8). Thomas did not believe Jesus was raised (Jh. 20:25), and though we are often hard on Thomas the other ten disciples did not believe the previous week when the women told them that Jesus was raised (Lk. 24:10-11). The connection of visible signs with faith fits the original idea of faith, that it could rest on evidence. This explains many situations in the gospels. People sought signs for believing. Jesus performed signs. Some saw and believed and others saw but did not believe. This was faith before the new definition.

This definition of faith applies to its verb *pisteuō*. Lexicons and morphology⁶ tables relate the noun *pistis* to the verb *peithō* [πείθω] "to apply persuasion" or "to trust, be confident."⁷ It is interesting however, that the Septuagint translators used *pistis* and the verb *pisteuō* for the related Hebrew words אמונה [*emunah*] and אמן [*amen*] while they used *peithō* to translate בטח [*batach*] "to trust."⁸ William Mounce includes *pistis* in a list of third declension nouns with *-is* endings.⁹ Among this list is the noun δικαίωσις - "justification" which uses the *-sis* ending to indicate activity.¹⁰ Most of the nouns in Mounce's list express action. *Pistis* does not have a full *-sis* ending but appears to express the action of believing. Morphologically it appears that the noun *faith* expresses an action related to the verb *believe*. It remains to be seen if Scripture bears this out.

Paul applies the new definition of faith to the verb in Romans four. He quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). In verse five, Paul connects believing and faith. One believes and so his faith is counted to him for

⁴ Adolf Deissman, *Bible Studies*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988) p. 79.

⁵ *idēte* [ἴδητε] where the *-ητε* ending is second person plural compared to second person singular ἴδης.

⁶ The forms of words and how they developed.

⁷ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1948) pp. 350-351.

⁸ Alexander Harkavy, *Student's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary to the Old Testament*, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1914) p. 55.

⁹ William D. Mounce, *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) pp. 205-206.

¹⁰ See Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, (Princeton, N.J.: Theological Book Agency, 1983) pp. 42-43.

righteousness. Paul does not repeat the verb *pisteuō* but substitutes the noun *pistis*. Paul explains that the promise is by faith so that it can be according to the standard of grace (4:16). The reception of God's promise comes from faith. In this way Abraham is a kind¹¹ of father of all us. Abraham believed beyond¹² hope and then upon hope (5:18). God made a promise to Abraham about his descendants and this was the basis of his hope **upon** which he believed. "Beyond hope" however indicates that Abraham had no reason other than God's promise to think that He would be a father. His body was as good as dead and Sarah was past the time of childbearing (4:19). Rather than faith bolstered by evidence, Abraham only had faith in God's promise. Because he exercised the same kind of faith we exercise, he is a kind of father of us all. Again Paul uses both the noun and verb to express this kind of faith. Paul asserts that it is impossible to please God apart from faith (Heb. 11:6). It is necessary for the one who comes to God to believe. Enoch believed that since God exists He rewards. Finally, people are not declared righteous from law works but through faith concerning Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). So, we have believed¹³ for the purpose¹⁴ that we might be declared righteous. Again, the noun and verb stand almost back to back to express how we are declared righteous.

Biblical faith and believing also rest on promises from God. We hope because we have a promise or promises from God (Acts 26:6; Eph. 2:12; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 10:23).¹⁵ We do not hope and believe just anything we wish. Biblically, God makes a promise to us (recorded in His Word) and from that promise we have hope. We believe in that hope. His Word and his promises constrain the extent of believing which can also be expressed by the noun faith. People saw Jesus crucified, taken down and buried and then saw Him again in the resurrection. But seeing is not believing, for Jesus appeared to ten of His disciples, and they were still unbelieving due their joy and amazement (Lk. 24:41). Believing is also distinct from seeing because believing always focuses on a connected promise. No one at the cross could see Jesus bearing our sins. Sins are intangible and the spiritual separation of the Son from the Father and Spirit was not visible. No one seeing Christ in His resurrection could see that He becomes the place where God the Father counts us to be (in Him) nor could they see His coming to indwell believers so that we might have eternal life. Neither has visible evidence. So one believes in Jesus Christ initially to be forgiven, which is another non-experiential transaction on God's part for our benefit. Believing like its noun faith rests on a promise from God.

The noun *pistis* and the verb *pisteuō* share the same definition. The Spirit's modification of the definition of the noun applies to the verb. Though often tied to the verb *peithō*, Paul's

¹¹ I use "kind of" to indicate that no definite article "the" occurs here. He is a quality or kind of father.

¹² The preposition *para* [παρά] can have the sense of beyond when used with an accusative case noun, which in this place "hope" ἐλπίδα and in the next occurrence ἐλπίδι the dative case.

¹³ ἐπιστεύσαμεν aorist active indicative

¹⁴ The conjunction ἵνα expresses purpose or aim, in this case being justified.

¹⁵ I offer the following translations to clarify the relationship of hope and promises from God. "Upon hope of/coming from/arising from [ablative case] the promise" (Acts 26:6). "Strangers from the covenants consisting of promises, not having hope" (Eph. 2:12). "Upon hope coming from life eternal which God promised" (Tit. 1:2). "Holding the agreement regarding the hope without wavering, for faithful is the one having promised" (Heb. 10:23).

proficiency in Greek and its usage allowed him to easily connect the noun and verb.

Faith or faithfulness, proof, pledge?

Occurring 243 times in the New Testament, the NASB translates the noun *pistis* “faith” 238 times, “proof” one time, “faithfulness” three times, and “pledge” one time.¹⁶ A perusal of statistics in other translations supports the idea that “faith” is the key idea. The few deviations may be due to how we understand each passage. For instance, when writing about the care of widows, Paul lists necessary character traits for the older widows to be enrolled (1 Tim. 5:9-11). They are not to permanently enroll younger widows, for they will strain for the Christ (the body) wishing to marry (5:11). By doing this they set aside their first **faith** or **pledge** [NASB, NIV] (5:12). God promises us the opportunity to serve in love and this is their first faith. But they do not serve in love and treat the body as a place to find a husband so as to neglect service in the process, even becoming idle (5:13). Contrast their idleness to the good work of the older widows in 5:10. “First faith” is better, but it takes some explanation in the context.

On Mars Hill as Paul finally gets around to talking about Jesus Christ, he tells the philosophers about God’s appointed judge (Acts 17:31). He says God extended or held out faith raising Him. The resurrection is an object of faith for salvation as in many texts. God did not provide **proof** or **assurance** but, consistent with Paul’s message in Acts, extends faith concerning the resurrection as the basis of salvation. This is Paul’s slim version of the gospel, and he gets no further once the philosophers realize he means literal resurrection not a god named Resurrection.¹⁷ He’s telling them that God requires all to change their minds and believe.

“Faith” is a more accurate translation than “faithfulness” in the last three passages. Faith is one of three qualities which should not be neglected while carefully keeping the Law (Matt. 21:21). Jesus knew the adjective *pistos* if that was what He wished to say. Jesus meant people should believe God’s promises, especially to maintain justice and mercy. Next, one individual’s lack of faith does not negate another’s faith concerning God (Rom. 3:3). The genitive *theou* indicates the object of faith (I’ll show this below) not God’s faith or faithfulness. In college, another student told me that because he did not believe, my faith could not be valid, as though faith is decided democratically. Finally, faith, not faithfulness, is one of nine parts of the fruit which the Spirit produces (Gal. 5:22). The fruit contrasted to the works of the flesh (5:19-21), characterizes those walking by the Spirit (5:16-18). The Spirit produces each part, the believer does not whether by practice or determination. Faithfulness results from diligence, whether the faithful slave, brother, or capable of teachers (Matt. 24:45; Eph. 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:2). Paul demonstrated faithfulness so that God entrusted him with service (1 Cor. 4:2; 1 Tim. 1:12). The fruit is the Spirit-produced ability to believe God’s promises so we may act upon them.

Texts where *pisteuō* does not indicate faith

A total of eight passages in the New Testament appear to use the verb *pisteuō* with the sense of

¹⁶ The ESV has similar statistics, while the NIV has a wide variety of translations. The AV has “faith” 239 times, belief, believe, and believeth, assurance, and fidelity one time each.

¹⁷ In Acts 17:18 they understood “the Jesus and the Resurrection” to be “strange demons/gods.”

“entrust.” The base idea of the verb was that of confidence in someone or something. God has altered the definition for us to exclude confidence based on sight or other concrete evidence. However, the verb retains the idea of entrust in these eight contexts where it reflects the Old Testament and secular Greek sense of *aman* and *pisteuō*.

The first six passages are the easiest to understand as the verbs are all in the passive voice. The passive voice indicates that someone else, in this case God, entrusted someone with something. So, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles or words of God (Rom. 3:2). God did not believe some promise within Israel, perhaps that they could handle, safeguard, and dispense His words. In one sense Israel did keep their text safe, though at times in their history the word was neglected and lost, as in the days before Josiah when the Law was lost (2 Chr. 34:14-15). Similarly, Paul was entrusted with several areas of teaching: a dispensation or stewardship (1 Cor. 9:17), the good news for the uncircumcised (Gal. 2:7), the good news about God (1 Thess. 2:4), the good news about the happy God (1 Tim. 1:11), and the proclamation of godliness based on eternal life (Tit. 1:3). If we apply the definition of believe and faith found in Hebrews 11:1 to these references, we must see a promise residing in Paul which produced a hope in God. In none of these is God believing in Paul. Rather, God trusted Paul with a task. 1 Timothy 1:11-12 illustrates this, as Paul states He was entrusted with the good news of the happy God. He explains that God gave him grace to empower him in Christ Jesus the Lord. God did this because he deemed Paul **faithful**. God viewed Paul as **faithful** to carry out his responsibility of explaining God’s nature as it relates to the present lives of His people. In each of these, God entrusts something to another’s management or care. God is the one entrusting, though the passive voice makes the individual/s or the thing the subject of the action, not God.

Two passages, however have the verb in the active voice (Lk. 16:11; Jh. 2:24). In the first instance, Jesus tells a story to illustrate the importance of being faithful even in the mundane things such wealth or property. He tells His disciples, “Therefore if you are not faithful in unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true *wealth*¹⁸ (Lk. 16:11). The verb “entrust” is a future active indicative of *pisteuō*. The pronoun “you” is in the LID form with the dative idea of “to you.” If I attempt to impose the definition “I believe” I would then render the sentence, “Therefore, if you are not faithful in unrighteous wealth, who will believe in you the true *wealth*?” This might fit the manner in which Greeks would have used the idea of believe, but to maintain a distinction regarding our New Testament definition, it is best to translate *pisteuō* “entrust.”

This brings me to John 2:24, “But Jesus Himself did not entrust/believe Himself to/for them because He knew all *men*.” In the Greek text “Himself” translates in the first instance a nominative pronoun **αὐτὸς** in the predicate position which acts as the intensive subject, so we have “Jesus, Himself.” In the second place the pronoun is accusative [**αὐτόν**] and functions as the object of the verb, “entrust/believe Himself.” (I will show that *pisteuō* takes an accusative object) The plural pronoun “to/for them” is in the LID form [**αὐτοῖς**]. We add the English preposition “to” or “for” to reflect a dative sense. Neither the locative sense “in them”

¹⁸ I add “wealth” assuming “true” is an ellipsis from the protasis (first clause or part) of the condition and corresponds to “unrighteous **wealth**.”

nor the instrumental sense “by means of them” make sense. Translating *pisteuō* “believe” means Jesus sees a promise in Himself but does not believe that promise for the benefit [Dative of Advantage] of the people. The context indicates “trust” is a better translation. Jesus did not entrust the proclamation of Who He is to this crowd. The reason He does not entrust them is that He knew all. Further, 2:24 states that He had no need of any to bear witness, which is how He could have entrusted Himself to them.

The expression “the man” introduces the following exchanges between Jesus and specific individuals: Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the official, the man at the pool and perhaps even the huge crowd who ate bread in chapter six. In each case we find individuals who struggled with Jesus’ identity and that identity interfered with their faith in Him. Jesus knew what was in Nicodemus and answers the questions Nicodemus wants to ask, and responds to the things Nicodemus wants to say but is hesitant to express. Nicodemus saw in Jesus’ signs at the very least that God must be with Him (Jh. 3:2), but stops short of expressing faith in Jesus as God. When we later meet Nicodemus, he has believed in Jesus (Jh. 7:50-51; 19:38-41).

“The man” extends to the Samaritan. Jesus knew the nature of the woman and told her all things she had done. When He spoke to her of the water which would spring up to eternal life, like Nicodemus, she struggles to see past the concrete: Nicodemus of the birth and she of the well (Jh. 4:14-15). Shortly after Jesus explains to her that He is the Messiah, she leaves her pot and returns to the city to tell others about this one she has met (Jh. 4:28-29). Perhaps still struggling, she expressed her question, “This is not the Christ, is it?” with the adverb μήτι which suggests a negative response. Either the woman is still uncertain of what to make of Jesus, or speaking to the men, she couches her question in the negative so as not to come across as assertive. This would have been likely as she had been cast aside by four previous husbands and may not have been considered a reliable witness.

We see Jesus’ knowledge of “the man” when He deals with the royal official in Capernum. This official asks Jesus to come heal his son who is about to die (Jh. 4:47). Jesus tells him that unless you continue seeing signs you won’t believe (4:48). When Jesus assures him that his son lives, the man believes and sets off for home. He arrives the next day and upon learning his son lives and that it was the same hour in which Jesus told him so, he believes again (4:50-53). This agrees with the nature of Old Testament faith, that it wanted constant reassurance.

We next see two very negative examples of “the man” in Jesus’ dealings with the lame man and the five thousand whom He had fed. Jesus healed a lame man, knowing he had lain beside the pool a long time (Jh. 5:5-9). Upon meeting him the second time, Jesus warned him not to sin so that nothing worse would happen, implying that He knew the man was lame for his own previous sin (5:5, 14). Though Jesus performs this sign on the man, the man gives no evidence that he believes in Jesus, even reporting Jesus to the religious leaders to get them off his back for carrying his pallet on the sabbath. The day after feeding well over five thousand people, they came seeking Jesus for more bread (6:26). Jesus tells them to believe in Him but reveals in a manner which many misunderstand that they saw believing in Him as repugnant as eating His flesh and drinking His blood (6:47-61). Most did not believe in Him. Since they did not believe in Him, Jesus did not **entrust** Himself to them, as they would not be proper witnesses. It may be that John’s record of Jesus’ conversations express peoples’ lack of faith in Him.

The relation of cases and prepositions to πίστις and πιστεύω

The Noun with Cases

The noun *faith* occurs 243 times in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition of the Greek New Testament. A noun is a substantive. In Greek most substantives can occur in any of five case forms which express one of eight case functions.¹⁹ Following is a chart showing the various forms of the second declension singular feminine noun πίστις - “faith”-followed by the general idea of each case. Differing cases can have similar ideas, but some distinction necessitated the use of that case. Separated by nearly two millennia the significance of such differences may escape the modern interpreter, but it exists just the same. It is our task to uncover such purposes.

Case	Form	Case Idea
Nominative	πίστις	Subject of a sentence
Genitive	Πίστεως	Relation
Ablative	Πίστεως	Separation
Locative	πίστει	Location
Instrumental	πίστει	Instrument or means
Dative	πίστει	Indirect Object
Accusative	πίστιν	Object of the action
Vocative	- not applicable -	Address

The noun *faith* expresses the idea of the verb *believe*. Transitive verbs such as *believe* take objects, that is the thing which one believes. Though *faith* is a noun and not a verb, an object is natural because it expresses what the faith is about.

The Greek noun *faith*, takes its object most commonly in the genitive case. This would be the Objective Genitive where “the genitive indicates the object or recipient of that action.”²⁰ So

¹⁹ Many grammars consider cases only in terms of form not function. Perschbacher states, “function is determined by context as well as by case and rarely by case alone.” Wesley J. Perschbacher, *New Testament Greek Syntax*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) p. viii. While in agreement, I find many Greek students unfamiliar with the ideas of the ablative, instrumental, and locative with only the genitive and dative forms. Daniel B. Wallace follows a five case system, though making many references to the eight case system, and appears to agree with my observation, “Second, the ‘very obvious fact’ that case is a matter of function rather than form is not as obvious to others as it is to eight-case proponents.” *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) p. 34.

²⁰ David Alan Black, *It’s Still Greek to Me*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) p. 49. Black asks of this passage in a note “Or does διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Rom. 3:22) mean ‘through faith in Jesus Christ’ or ‘through the faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ’ (cf. Rom. 3:26; Gal. 2:16, 20)?” I do not think “faithfulness” is an appropriate translation of the feminine noun *pistis*. Additionally, if this is faith of Jesus Christ, it would mean that He exercised faith. That means He believes some promise. Here is where honing the New Testament definition of *pistis* is important.

Romans 3:22 “faith **in** Jesus Christ” is properly “faith concerning Christ.”²¹ Galatians 2:20 helps us, as Paul states that he nows live in flesh, but lives by faith concerning the Son of God. He is not living by the Son’s faith in him, or the Son’s faith in some promise. He lives by directing faith at the Son as the object of faith. In 2:4 Paul spoke of our freedom/liberty which we have in Christ. That freedom is promise which the believer only experiences in Christ. Therefore, as part of his Christian life, Paul directs faith at Christ Jesus who died for the purpose of freeing us (2:21). Believers are also to work together in the faith concerning the gospel (Php. 1:27). The gospel isn’t believing anything. It is the object of this faith, and Paul uses it in the genitive case. James warned against exercising our faith concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with favoritism (Jas. 2:1). The Lord Jesus Christ is not believing something, we are. We’re living by faith concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptural evidence shows the genitive case acts as the object of the noun *faith*.

The Noun with Prepositions

πίστις [*faith*] occurs with with a variety of prepositions. “A preposition is a word used to help substantives express their case function.”²² “A substantive is a word or group of words that can be used as a noun.”²³ I am only considering prepositions which seem to indicate direction or object of faith. So Paul uses πρὸς with an accusative object, in Philemon 5, “the faith which you have **to/facing** the Lord Jesus.” We have it with the preposition ἐπὶ, “faith **upon** God” probably indicating that it rests on God (Heb. 6:1). Faith occurs with the preposition εἰς nine times (Acts 20:21; 24:24; 26:18; Rom. 4:5, 9; 5:2; 16:26; Heb. 10:39; 1 Pet. 1:5). The first three express faith to, toward or into Jesus Christ. The remaining passages refer either to the cause or result of faith, not its object.

Faith is used with ἐν in seventeen passages. In none of these does ἐν indicate the object as “faith **in** Christ.” It can sometimes simply mean the place where it is displayed such as “among the Gentiles” or “in the whole world” (Rom. 1:5, 8, 12; Matt. 8:10). It can refer to the circumstances, as “in all your persecutions” of “**with** a clean conscience (2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Pet. 1:1). It can indicate the instrument of faith such as man’s wisdom or God’s power (1 Cor. 2:5). It can tie to another matter in the passage. In Galatians 3:26 it expresses where we are sons of God, not where we direct faith, and similarly Ephesians 3:17 “in your hearts” indicates where Christ settles down at home. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 “in power” modifies work: “work from faith by power.” Six other occurrences of faith with ἐν relate the believer’s exercise of faith to his position in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:14; 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:15). These six involve some promise relating to being in Christ. 1 Timothy 1:14 illustrates this by the combination of faith and love in Christ Jesus. Paul does not mean one’s love directed to

²¹ It seems that the translation “**in** Jesus Christ” is a carry over from the translation of the verb and the preposition *eis*.

²² Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1950) p. 32.

²³ Richard A Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek a Linguistic and Exegetical Approach*, (Nashville: Braodman & Holman Publishers, 1994) p. 148. A substantive indicates a person, place or thing, even events, ideas, or emotions. Perschbacher, op. cit., p. 11.

Christ Jesus but love one can exercises as one abides in Christ. In this same way, the faith is not directed at Christ but most likely the opportunity to exercise Spirit-produced love because he or she abides in Christ. So, the noun faith combined with these prepositions rarely indicates the object of faith. This is especially important with the prepositions εἰς and ἐν which are thought to communicate the object of the faith.

The Verb with the Accusative case

The verb *believe* occurs 241 times in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition of the Greek New Testament. I am focusing on nouns which might act as the object of the verb. Romans 4:17 appears to provide the lone example of *believe* with a potential object in the genitive case, “before Whom, He believed, God the one making alive the dead.” It is also possible that Abraham believed standing before God as God promised him to be the father of many nations (Gen. 17:5). This reflects the preposition *katenanti*. The verb relates to nouns in the LID form forty-two times and in the accusative sixty-three times. 23 times the verb indicates its object or content believed by the use of the conjunction ὅτι [*hoti*] followed by the content. More frequently the content believed is expressed without the *hoti* conjunction, a total of sixty-eight times.

Substantives in the accusative may simply express the object that is *believed*. After criticizing the disciples’ unbelief that He was alive, Jesus promised signs to follow those who “believe these things” (Mk. 16:17). “These things” translates the accusative pronoun *tauta*²⁴ and refers to His resurrection and accompanying details. The Jews would not believe the *work*²⁵ God would do (Acts 13:41). Through Peter the Gentiles would hear and believe *the word*²⁶ consisting of the good news (Acts 15:7). The believers know and believe *the love*²⁷ God has (1 Jh. 4:16). In each instance, the accusative expresses the content of truth which is believed.

The remaining fifty-nine occurrences with the accusative occur with two prepositions, forty-four with εἰς and fifteen with ἐπί. The base idea of *epi* is *upon*. Jesus is like a foundation stone in the structure of Zion, and those who believe *upon* Him will not be put to shame (1 Pet. 2:6; Rom. 9:33; 10:11). Like a foundation stone upon which other stones rest, so individuals rest their faith upon Him. Though I dealt with this passage earlier, Romans 4:18 adds clarity to the idea. God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations. Abraham had no concrete reason to believe this, as both he and Sarah were incapable of conceiving children, but he was not weak in the faith, and beyond hope, upon hope he believed. I have translated the preposition *para beyond* as the context demands that he had no good reason to hope this in himself. *Upon* hope tells us Abraham’s faith rested on the hope based on God’s promise. These four passages illustrate well the idea of faith coming to rest on the foundation of a promise or a promise associated with the person of Christ. Nearly all the remaining passages with *epi* have some reference to Jesus Christ such as “the Lord” (Acts 11:21) or to God “the One declaring

²⁴ ταῦτα is the neuter accusative plural form of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος.

²⁵ An accusative singular noun, ἔργον.

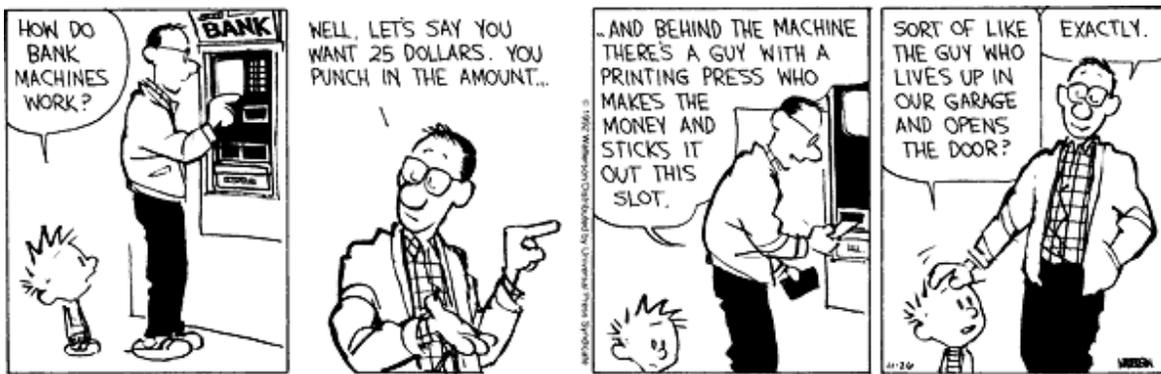
²⁶ The accusative form λόγον of λόγος.

²⁷ The accusative form ἀγάπην of ἀγάπη.

righteous”, “the One raising Jesus” (Rom. 4:5, 24). The previous examples may not require but support the idea that individuals are believing upon the Lord, resting their faith on Him.

After examining the many grammatical constructions with *pisteuō*, I’ve concluded that the preposition *eis* and the substantive in the accusative indicates the object of this verb. Of the many possible meanings of *eis*, direction towards is nearer its base idea. The sense of *into* when used with persons, such as “believe *in* Him” (Jh. 3:16), indicates more than a surface idea, but that of taking the individual seriously. Of believing promises which rest on who he is or what he does. Though certain contexts may seem to disagree with this, these can be seen to agree.

The first passage which uses *eis* to indicate the object of the verb is Matthew 18:6, where Jesus warns against causing any impediment to “one of these little ones who are believing *into* Me.” In a similar statement, Jesus told them to receive the kingdom of God like a child²⁸ would receive it (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17). This is not hard to understand. Children accept what they are told. They may be full of questions but normally accept answers. They don’t overthink it.



When Jesus told them who He is, unlike the many adults who asked for signs and testimony, children accepted what He said. They believed *into* His person. Did they know or understand everything about Him? No, but they believed what had been revealed to them at that point.

Name may only emphasize what has been revealed not everything that could be revealed.

The second key text is John 1:12 which forms part of John’s introduction. Jesus came to His own *things*²⁹ but His own *people*³⁰ did not receive Him (1:11). Generally most rejected Him during His earthly ministry but some did receive Him (1:12). *Receive* translates *lambanō* in this verse and *paralambanō* in the previous verse distinct from *dexomai* in the previous Matthew text. While *dexomai* means to welcome, *lambanō* and *paralambanō* mean to receive by taking, perhaps closely to one’s self.³¹ Some took Jesus to themselves. They were not loosely attached but recognized in Him what they needed. John clarifies that these were believing in His name.

²⁸ A *paidion* [παῖδιον] or young trainable child.

²⁹ A neuter plural pronoun τὰ ἴδια and so things, i.e. creation.

³⁰ A masculine plural pronoun οἱ ἴδιοι and so probably people. This seems borne out in John’s account.

³¹ Stephen D. Renn sees *lambanō* and *paralambanō* as “‘receiving’ with the sense of ‘acquire’ or ‘gain.’” *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005) pp. 786, 787.

Believe is a present participle indicating ongoing or incomplete action. Its time is when they received Him. In this context the aorist verb “received” looks back at this event for each individual who met or heard Jesus during His earthly ministry. John 1:12 does not describe a situation which exists today,³² but a contrast between those who rejected Jesus during His earthly ministry and those who received Him. The apostles do not use this language of our experience. As evidenced in the remainder of John, *believing into His name* did not mean one knew or understood everything that was true about Jesus. Martha was a believer in Jesus Christ and expressed faith in Him (Jh. 11:27). Yet when Jesus arrived she said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21). She believed, but did not yet understand fully who Jesus was. His disciples believed *into* Him in response to His sign of changing water into wine (Jh. 2:11). Yet when their hearts were troubled, He had to charge them to believe³³ *into* Him (14:1). Even after Abraham believed God’s promise of innumerable descendants, he questions or doubts God’s promise of land (Gen. 15:7-8). Though one has believed, it does not mean one knows and therefore has believed every promise associated with Jesus.

Jesus stated that the one believing *into* Him is not judged, while those who have not believed *into the name* of the special kind of Son of God already stand judged³⁴ (Jh. 3:18). Some have accepted as true His claims and have believed into the promise/s embedded in His identity. Others rejected His claims and therefore, would did not believe any promises regarding Him. He promised eternal life for those who believe *into* Him (Jh. 3:36; 6:40), that they would never thirst (6:35), that they have the ministry of the Spirit (7:38-39), that they will live if they die (11:25), that they won’t die into the age (11:26), that they will not abide in the darkness (12:46), that they will do works greater in number than Jesus did (14:12). Believing *into* Him sees His character as far as it is revealed, and sees a promise connected to Him.

Though I have already touched on this event, the situation involving the Samaritan illustrates well the idea of incremental faith. After Jesus speaks with her, she returned to her city and called for the people to see a man who told me everything I ever did (Jh. 4:29). She ended this call, “This is not the Christ, is it?” [NASB] This sentence begins with the particle *mēti* [μήτι] a compound of *mē* a negative particle *no* or *not* and the interrogative pronoun *tis* “who?”. Placed at the beginning of a question, it expects the listener to say, *no*. The woman seems convinced that He is Messiah, and certainly Jesus told so (4:25-26), but she asks the question to suggest but not assert. Perhaps her reputation as one having been with five different men may have caused others to question her reliability. However, many did believe *into* Him because of what she said, and her testimony that He had told her her past (4:39). He stays with them for two more days at their request and continues to teach. Many now believed because of Jesus’ words and claim that they do so because they heard Him and not because of what the woman said (4:41-42). This is important because it demonstrates something we see repeated in John, that one can believe at a point but then believe again later, perhaps for a different reason, perhaps

³² At that time they could not become God’s children. They received authority to become His children at a future point. We do not receive this authority but become His children immediately upon believing.

³³ *Believe* is a present active **indicative** or **imperative** verb as they share the same form here. His statement about believing into the Father is an indicative, what they were doing, the second is imperative, what they needed to do.

³⁴ This translation is my emphasis of the perfect tense verb.

focused on a new promise, perhaps due to new revelation.

Believing *into* Jesus is to believe what is revealed about Him in that context. Jesus explained that one who believed *into* Him, believes *into* the One who sent Him (Jh. 12:44). Because Jesus is God, it was necessary that they believe *into* God the Father, not just the Son. Some unitarian religious groups deny the Father is a distinct person but a face or expression of the Son. However, the Father sent the Son, and Jesus' hearers were to believe *into* the One who sent Him (Jh. 5:23-24). These two instances demonstrate that believing *into* Jesus Christ involved recognizing that He is deity and the One sent from the Father. Such people had to see He was more than just a sign-working man.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostles also speak of believing *into* Jesus Christ. In Caesarea Peter applied the promise of the prophets to the gospel, "all who believe³⁵ *into* Him receive forgiveness of sins through His name" (Acts 10:43). Addressing Peter, Paul asserted, "We have believed *into* Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:16). It has been graciously given for us to believe *into* Him (Php 1:29). While those believing *into* the Son have eternal life, while those who do not believe have not believed *into* the testimony which God testified concerning the Son of God (1 Jh. 5:10). John's additional statement about not believing *into* the testimony clarifies again the importance of *into* apprehending what God has testified or revealed about the Son. It is more than faith in the surface presentation of who the Son is but faith that focuses *into* something, in this case the Son's identity as the Father has testified of Him. Further, the perfect tense of *believe* indicates that they did not believe this testimony in the past and continue to not believe it.

The verb *believe* occurs with the preposition $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and the accusative case to indicate cause. In these the accusative is not the object of faith but the "because" due to this grammatical relationship. So the Samaritans believed *because* of the woman's words and lastly *because* of Jesus' words (Jh. 4:39, 41, 42). Many believed *into* Jesus *because* of Lazarus' resurrection (12:11).

The verb with the locative/instrumental/dative case form

Substantives in the LID share a single form. Context determines whether the substantive is the instrument by which one hears the message or the indirect recipient of that action. The Instrumental of means³⁶ indicates that *by which* one hears the content and believes. When Jesus is questioned by the Jewish religious leaders, He counters with the question, "The baptism of John, from where was it, out of heaven or out of men? Now they were discussing *this* among themselves saying, 'If we should say, 'Out of heaven.' He will say to us, 'Why did you not then believe him?'" (Matt. 21:25)³⁷ Our English Bibles simply have "believe him." In 21:32, Jesus three times says, "believe him." Later, Paul tells John's disciples that people were to believe in the one coming after John, that is Jesus (Acts 19:4). Here, "the one coming" and

³⁵ Articular present active participle $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$.

³⁶ For which see H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1955) p. 88f. Black, Wallace, Perschbacher and other five-case grammarians classify this under the Dative of Instrument.

³⁷ This account and this grammatical construction occurs in all three synoptic gospels.

“Jesus” are both in the accusative as the object of believing. For this reason, John is an **instrument** by which the people heard about Jesus who was to follow him. In each of these statements, they are not to believe in John but *by means* of John. So Matthew 21 means he is the instrument which proclaims the coming kingdom and king in connection with his baptism. I might paraphrase this idea, “Believe what he says.”

John’s gospel may illustrate this instrumental usage best. Fifteen times John records believing connected to a substantive in a LID form. In answering the Jews’ charge of blasphemy against Jesus, He said, “If I do not do the works from my Father, do not believe **by means of Me**. But, if I do *the works from my Father*, even if you do not believe **by means of Me**, believe **by means of the works** that you might know and should know that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (Jh. 10:37-38). They were to believe the relationship between the Father and Son.³⁸ Both the Son speaking and the works He did could be instruments by which they believe this message. We may want to say one believes **in Jesus** but we don’t claim to believe **in the works**. John 14:11 makes this clear with similar language, “Believe **by Me** that I am in the Father and the Father *is* in Me; if not, believe because of these works.” In this text, the conjunction *hoti* indicates what is believed, similar to John 10:37-38, so it is not believing in the Son, but believing what He tells them. He is the instrument of this revelation. If they won’t believe Him, then they were to believe “because of,” which translates *dia* with the accusative case. This helps us as “because of” is distinct while at the same time similar to the idea of the instrument. In 1 John 4:1, John warns his readers, “Do not believe every spirit but prove the spirits.” As believers continued to receive revelation, due to the Canon not yet being concluded, believers needed to test the source of the revelation. Some spirits did not agree that Jesus has come³⁹ in flesh and in this way believers could know these spirits are not from God. That would mean they are not God-sent instruments for His revelation to His people. John isn’t warning against faith in spirits but in what the spirits say or reveal.

Though the instrumental case makes sense, it is also possible that LID form substantives express a simple Dative of Indirect Object. “It names the person or thing to which something is done or given.”⁴⁰ The indirect object works well because the accusative case expresses what is believed while the dative expresses indirect focus of believing. So to use the example of John the baptizer in Matthew 21, what John said about the kingdom and the king was what they believed, but they believed John as the indirect focus. After Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples believed *the Scripture and the word* which Jesus had said (Jh. 2:22). The Scripture and the word told of Jesus’ resurrection, and that is what they believed. The Scripture and word were the indirect focus of their faith which focused on the promise of His resurrection. Jesus told the crowd, “‘This is the work from God, that you believe *into Whom* that One sent.’ Therefore, they said to Him, ‘What sign, therefore, do you do, that we might see and believe *in you*? What will you work?’” (Jh. 6:29-30). Jesus uses εἰς ὃν “into Whom” which expresses the

³⁸ Believing is in a promise. The promise in this context is having eternal life (Jh. 10:28) and being held securely by both the Father and the Son, and they are one thing, i.e. the power (hand) to hold them securely (Jh. 10:28-30).

³⁹ The participle “has come” is perfect tense, laying emphasis on a present reality due to a past act, therefore, He came in flesh and is in flesh.

⁴⁰ Black, op. cit., p. 52. See also, Dana & Mantey, op. cit., p. 84.

object of their faith. The crowds says σοι “in you” a simple LID form pronoun. They required of Him a sign before they would consider Him an acceptable messenger. We should not minimize this distinction.⁴¹ D.A. Carson claims, “The dative is John’s preferred construction when the object of faith is a thing (4:50; 5:47; 10:38). When the object of faith is a person, John may use the dative or he may resort to *pisteuō eis* plus the accusative.”⁴² I concur that six times John uses the LID form of things while he only use the accusative preceded by *eis* one time (11:26).⁴³ However, if you accept the idea that the LID form expresses either the instrumental or indirect object, things in the LID case form make sense, because the thing itself is not the object of faith but the indirect focus or the instrument used to communicate **what** is believed. So Jesus’ works are not the object of faith, but the instrument which encourages or presses one to believe into what Jesus reveals about Himself.

In just a few places, we find δία with the genitive case which together indicates an agent through which something is accomplished. In these cases people hear the gospel through the agency of John, the disciples, and Paul (Jh. 1:7; 17:20; Acts 15:7). This is similar to the LID idea.²

Conclusion regarding πιστεύω with cases and prepositions

An accusative object with the preposition *eis* indicates the content one believes. I do not think *believe* takes a dative object. Rather the instrumental form of the noun indicates the instrument or means by which one believes or hears the promise which is to be believed. In some texts, the dative form of the noun may indicate the indirect object of believing. The preposition *eis* presses believing beyond a surface impression into the content revealed. *En* intensifies the importance of the instrumental idea. *Epi* designates the grounds or foundation of one’s faith. Remember in each of these that faith or believing always begins with a promise from God. The promise tied to truth is what one believes, and this is expressed best by *eis* with the accusative case while *en* with the instrumental case expresses best the instrument which communicates that promise, even if that promise is embedded in the person of Jesus Christ.

The use of ὅτι to express the object or content of faith

The conjunction ὅτι occurs 23 times with the *believe* to indicate what one believes. “That” often translates this conjunction. So we have Jesus charging people to believe “that I am able to do this” (Mk. 9:28). When Paul first arrived in Jerusalem as a new believer, the disciples did not believe “that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). After Jesus healed the blind man, and the man spoke to the people, John tells us the Jews did not believe “that he had been blind and saw again” (Jh. 9:18). In each of these *that* [ὅτι] directs our attention to what one believes.

⁴¹ D.A. Carson states that the *pisteuō* with the dative or with *eis* and the accusative “are synonymous for John.” *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) p. 183.

⁴² *ibid.*,

⁴³ He does have “His name” 1:12; 2:23; 3:18 and “the Light” 12:36, but these are all personal, “His name” expressing Jesus’ character or person, and “the Light” His life in activity. On the breadth of the “name” see F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p. 38 “The ‘name’ is much more than the designation by which a person is known; it means the real character or sometimes, as here, the person himself.”

Jesus told the Jews they must believe “*that I AM*” (Jh. 8:24). His disciples stated that they believed “*that You are the Holy One of God*” (Jh. 6:69). Though Martha does not believe that Jesus will or can raise her brother, she **knows** *that* whatever He ask from God, God will give, and she believes “*that You are the Christ the Son of God coming into the world*” (Jh. 11:22, 27). We expect Martha to run to Jesus and say, “O, good, you’re here. Would you please raise my brother?” But she does not. She expresses faith in one breath and doubtful despair in the next. Salvation hangs in part on believing in our heart *that* God raised Jesus from dead ones (Rom. 10:9). Everyone who believes *that* Jesus is the Christ (resurrected one) has been born from God (1 Jh. 5:1). Despite the world’s efforts to stifle and mock faith in Christ, we are winners over the world by believing *that* Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jh. 5:5). Since we have believed *that* Jesus died and rose again, we have hope regarding fellow believers who have died (1 Thess. 4:14).

Content expressed without the conjunction ὅτι

The conjunction *hoti* is not necessary to express what is believed. Seventy-one times *believe* has its object expressed in a larger context. Sometimes the content is expressed by a simple objective clause. We have many passages in which the content is expressed prior to the statement that one believes or should believe. One is told a truth and then told to believe that truth or told the promise for which one should believe that truth.

Jesus charged the ruler of the synagogue to not fear but believe (Mk. 5:36). The preceding context regards the ruler’s child. So he is to believe the child will be healed. John records many statements in which Jesus charged people to believe or pointed out their lack of belief. The following are examples where the content is in the preceding context. They were to believe that He is the bread (Jh. 6:35-36), has seen the Father (6:46-47), is the Son of man (9:35, 38), is the Christ (10:24-26), is the resurrection and the life (11:25, 40). Several times in Acts, Luke writes of people believing that Jesus is alive or resurrected (Acts 2:44; 4:4 with 3:16, 26; 4:32; 13:48, 38-39, 28-30; 17:31-34; 19:18 with 19:10). He is the implied object when Paul refers to the gospel in Romans 1:16. Christ is the object (a genitive) of faith, so He is the object of believing in Romans 3:22. God is well-pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of simply proclaiming the message of Christ crucified, and also raised (1 Cor. 1:21, 23; 15:11).

In several passages, the object of believing is not specifically stated. So our salvation is near than when we believed (Rom. 13:11). Paul didn’t have to review with the Roman believers what they had believed at the first. They knew it. He simply referenced their act. So we find this in many passages (1 Cor. 3:5; 14:22; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2:10, 13; 1 Pet. 2:7).

If possible, we must determine from context the object one believes. Today, all faith has the same quality, however, all faith does not have the same object. Many interpreters treat nearly every reference to faith or believing as a reference to initial salvation. Believing that God will finish in me what He began, is not the same as believing *into* Christ at the outset of salvation. Believing that I can grow through a difficulty should not be confused with faith in the gospel at the beginning. Once I am forgiven and declared righteous, I don’t need to go back and repeat that act of faith in Jesus Christ. It remains true that I am forgiven and Christ has become righteousness for me (Col. 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:30). Even the young believers knew their sins were and remained forgiven, an idea John expressed with a perfect tense verb (1 Jh. 2:12). However, God

has made many other promises to us as New Testament believers, and these we must believe whenever such promises are appropriate to the situation. If I am facing a temptation, God promises me wisdom if I ask, but if I am not being tempted at that moment this promise is not appropriate (Jas. 1:5-6). As a believer I believe that eating meat cannot alter my relationship to God in any way (Rom. 14:1-2). If someone offers me meat, I don't need to inquire as to its origins, I'm OK. This promise rests on three previous promises in Romans: that I am not condemned in Christ (8:1); that nothing can separate me from Christ's love (8:35); that nothing can separate me from God's love (8:38-39). The immature believer needs to learn and believe those promises in order to be stable. He has already believed the gospel for initial salvation and does not need to rebelieve that initial promise. This is not to say that we do not believe that promise (hence the perfect tense), but the issue of initial salvation is settled and not to be repeated. Recognizing the object of faith clears some problems regarding believing and faith.

Some problem passages involving πιστεύω

I now wish to deal with some passages which seem to challenge our understanding of faith and believing. Do the writers of Scripture use the word *believe* to refer to false faith or of those who do not genuinely believe? Many Bible students assert this is true. How we answer this question affects our understanding of faith as well as salvation. I'm convinced that understanding the grammatical constructions I've considered

Salvation by faith alone in Christ has been a hallmark of Protestant Christianity including Evangelicals and Fundamentalists old and new. However, discussions among those who bear these titles demonstrate no clear agreement on the definition of faith. F.F. Bruce comments on John 2:23, "There are two levels of believing in Jesus' name - that spoken of in John 1:12, which carries with it authority to become God's children, and that spoken of here. The former level involves unreserved personal commitment, that practical acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, but it will not be attained so long as 'we see the signs but see not him'."⁴⁴ Carson states that proper faith "yields allegiance to the Word, trusts him completely, acknowledges his claims and confesses him with gratitude."⁴⁵ Both demonstrate a theological definition of faith which adds the idea of commitment or allegiance to the Biblical definition. This results in problems.

Incremental Faith: I believe, I believe more, I believe yet again...

Prior to the cross, faith could be repeated in the same object, growing incrementally. Remember, a person only believes once for initial salvation, and at the time of the Gospels, one did so because the Father revealed it to him (Matt. 16:17). But an individual might believe and when presented with additional information believe again, not for salvation but for another benefit. Merrill Tenney sees "growth in this faith" and adds, "Growth was not always uniform, as Simon Peter's experience shows, and generally was countered by a growth of unbelief, as seen in the conduct of Jesus' enemies."⁴⁶ The Samaritans demonstrate this growth; they first

⁴⁴ Bruce, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁵ Carson, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) p. 12.

believed on the testimony of the woman and later on what Jesus said to them. This type of faith also results in situations where those who believe may lack confidence in the next moment. The man who appealed for Jesus to heal his son claimed, “I believe, help⁴⁷ my unbelief.” (Mk. 9:24). Jesus does not deny that the man’s faith is legitimate. This illustrates the nature of faith in the dispensation of Law prior to the cross. These people are like Abraham who believed God’s promise of seed in Genesis 15:6 but a moment later responded to God’s promise of land by asking how he could know for sure that God would do this (15:7-8).

J. Carl Laney recognizes this incremental development in faith. “Yet from John’s viewpoint, belief does not necessarily take place instantaneously but is aroused, nurtured, strengthened, and confirmed.”⁴⁸ Though Laney sees this nature of faith in John, he still concludes that some of them did not exercise genuine faith. On John 2:22-23 he comments, “Christ discerned that their faith was superficial, based only on the miracles they had seen.”⁴⁹ Commenting on the same passage, F.F. Bruce similarly states, “The expression ‘many believed in his name’ is used in John 2:23 in a weaker sense, of people who accorded him an outward assent without an accompanying inward allegiance.”⁵⁰ D.A. Carson sees the important *into His name* expression, but describes their faith as “spurious.”⁵¹ Gaebelein calls it “intellectual belief which...felt no need of a Saviour...”⁵² So interpreters question the validity of faith based on signs. However, if we understand the distinct nature of believing prior to the cross, and that faith could grow with additional revelation, it explains situations which others would consider dubious faith.

John 2:23 is one of these harder texts regarding believing. John states, “many *believed into His name*”—the same expression used in 1:12. In 1:12 *believe* is a present participle and in 2:23 an aorist verb, however, the verb parallels the aorist *received* used in 1:12. A survey of commentaries on this text, finds none that treat this as genuine faith, but spurious, temporary or artificial. I think we need to take more seriously the importance of *believing* in John especially as he uses the preposition *eis* and that connected to *His name*. I would suggest these people genuinely believed, but as John shows, at that time, even those who believe often did not fully understand who Jesus is, and that included His twelve disciples. The final issue, is that Jesus did not need these people to be His witness (2:25). The Father, His works and He himself were His witness (5:31-37).

John tells us that Jesus’ disciples believed *into Him* upon seeing His first sign (Jh. 2:11). Are we also to conclude that they were not believers? Do His disciples give great evidence of faith? What are we to make of their lack faith when Jesus asked about feeding the five thousand (Jh. 6:5-6). Here *disciples* refers to the twelve. Jesus questioned them with a *peiradzō* type of *test*, one

⁴⁷ The verb *βοηθέω* “help” is used in eight passages in the New Testament. In seven of these it has an object which is always in dative case, e.g. “help me.” In Mark 9:22 “the unbelief” is the object.

⁴⁸ J. Carl Laney, *John, Moody Gospel Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) p. 20

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 21

⁵⁰ Bruce, *op. cit.*, fn 16, p. 64.

⁵¹ Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁵² A.C. Gaebelein, *John*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1982) p. 54.

which expected them to fail, and indeed they did. Or what about their crossing the lake into a violent headwind and the fear? Allowing Lazarus to die provided Jesus an opportunity to do a sign so His disciples could believe, apparently *into* Him (Jh. 11:15). He told them He would be betrayed so that when it happened they would believe “I AM”, that He is deity (13:19). But they had already expressed faith in His deity. So, was their faith superficial? It is better to understand their faith as growing in that pre-cross context. Their faith could be like a small mustard seed (Matt. 17:20). At times they believed, but on facing a new challenge they sometimes did not believe or needed to believe anew.

Believing and signs

In the context of the Old Testament, signs do not preclude genuine faith. When Jesus spoke to the people of Jerusalem, some wished to seize Him, while many believed *into* Him (Jh. 7:31). They said to the other people, “Whenever the Christ comes, He will not do more signs than this one has done.” They state the question expecting a negative answer as the Samaritan woman did. The negative may suggest that they think He is the Christ but hesitate to make such a bold assertion. Their question is similar to Nicodemus who wants to believe Jesus is the Christ, and recognizes the importance of His signs, but hesitates. Toward the end of His ministry, many believed in Him but would not openly agree⁵³ regarding His identity because they feared the Jewish religious leaders (12:42). John doesn’t treat these as cases of dubious faith, but genuine faith. The threatening reach of the religious leaders intimidated these believers into silence. While we might like to think we would not have so responded, we should remember Peter’s three denials. He expressed the disciples’ faith in Jesus’ deity (Son of God) and yet during Jesus’ trial, denies knowing Jesus. Despite bold theological definitions, believing or faith does not mean one is whole heartedly committed to Christ and I’m convinced any believer who is honest with him or herself knows this to be true in their own life experience.

In the section on the [the definition of faith](#), I demonstrated from several passages that people believed seeing signs and the Scriptures never consider their faith to be anything other than genuine faith. At the same time, many saw signs but did not believe. The real issue involves distinguishing between faith exercised prior to the present dispensation from that which we exercise. Our faith is without sight and not based on visible evidences.

John recounts other individual’s faith connected with signs. The former blind man had not yet believed in Jesus but questioned the Pharisees as to how a sinner could do the sign of healing his blindness (Jh. 9:16). Many of the Jews who witnessed the resuscitation of Lazarus believed *into* Jesus (11:45; 12:11). Others believed *into* Him apart from any mention of a sign (10:42). Having eaten their fill of fish and bread, the people expressed their faith in Jesus, “This one is of a truth the Prophet⁵⁴ who is to come into the world” (6:14). When this crowd pursued Him the following day, Jesus said it was not due to seeing the sign but due to eating their fill—they wanted another free meal (Jh. 6:26). John explains that Jesus knew that some of these people

⁵³ This is the Greek *homologeō* [ὁμολογέω] translated “confess” in our English Bibles. I think “agree” represents the idea best in modern English.

⁵⁴ Moses prophesied that God would send them a prophet (Jh. 5:45-47; Deut. 18:15).

did not believe and many of His disciples⁵⁵ stopped walking with Him (Jh. 6:64, 66). That means in reading John six, that some do believe.

John 6: Some believed but many did not

How did unbelievers understand Jesus' call for them to believe? They asked for signs. They considered the call to believe to be repugnant. When Jesus explains that the Father wants them to believe *into Him*, the Jews grumble (Jh. 6:40-41). He tells them He is the bread of life and again tells them that believing (presumably *into Him*) is how they could have eternal life (6:47-48). Knowing that they do not believe in Him and do not wish to do so, He uses the metaphor of His flesh as bread, and that they need to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jh. 6:53). Verses 47 and 54 bear some parallels. First, in both verses Jesus uses an articular present active participle to describe the individual: the one believing in 47 and the one eating ... and drinking in 54. Second, the result of believing and the result of eating and drinking is the same—eternal life, where *has* is a present act indicative verb. He has already told them that the object of believing is *into Him* (v. 40), and in 53 He parallels believing to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Many obsess over whether this latter verse speaks about communion. It does not. For many in Jesus' audience believing in Him was as repugnant as having to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Both statements also begin with Jesus assuring them He is speaking the truth, "Truly, truly I say to you" (for 6:54 see v. 53). The comparison of these two verses helps clarify the idea of believing εἰς αὐτὸν-*into Him*. Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood pictures well the idea of "receiving" Jesus as in 1:12, so that believing *into Him* meant one did not take a casual interest in Jesus, but a very personal interest with regard to whatever revelation he had at that time. The unbelievers found Jesus' call to believe offensive similar to how unbelievers today view the things of God as moronic and mock His promised judgment (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Pet. 3:3ff). Since Jesus knew those who didn't believe, we know this to be a mixed crowd did of believers and unbelievers (Jh. 6:64).

John 8:30ff: Many believed, or did they?

Understanding that Jesus often addressed a mixed crowd and that each segment of the crowd responded to Him differently helps us in John 8. After demonstrating grace in His handling of the woman caught in adultery (Jh. 1:17), Jesus resumes speaking to the people in the temple (8:12, 20). He is the Word in flesh always existing as God. He identifies Himself as God many times in John and requires the people to believe that He is God, the very I AM who met Moses in the burning bush (8:24). If one does not believe that He is the I AM, that one will die in his sins. After further explaining His identity and the reason behind His works and words, John tells us, "Many believed *into Him*." (8:30).

Jesus then speaks to those who "have come to believe *by means of Him*." (Jh. 8:31). The words "who had believed" [NASB] translate a perfect active participle, indicating a past act with a continuing result in the context. Andreas Köstenberger suggests that John used the perfect with the idea of a pluperfect⁵⁶ where the result has ended in the context. That means, John

⁵⁵ This also demonstrates that one could be a disciple and not believe.

⁵⁶ Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) p. 261 fn.

would be saying that these believed, continued to believe, but no longer believe. This fits Köstenberger's reading of the difficult following context in which he thinks these people prove to be unbelievers. First, if John wished to use the pluperfect, he could have because he used it three times as often as the other gospel writers.⁵⁷ Second, John made frequent use of the perfect: 283 times compared to Matthew who uses it 113 times, Mark 93 times, and Luke 171 times. So, John had a good grasp of the perfect. Even more so, we must recognize that the Holy Spirit directed John in the choice of every word and every form. Additionally, John only uses *pisteuō* in the perfect tense six times and every occurrence except 8:31 clearly has the idea of an abiding result and indicates the actions of true believers. I don't think the problem is settled by interpreting the perfect verb as a pluperfect.

In light of my earlier conclusions on the verb believe with different cases and prepositions, I find it interesting that John switches from *believe into* [*eis* with the Acc] to *believe in/by Me* [instrumental with no preposition]. This does not change the nature of their faith. John already told us they believed *into Him*. W.E. Vine thinks this forms a difference between two groups, one in verse 30 and a second in 31. He writes, "The former had full faith in Him; the later were simply disposed to believe what He said."⁵⁸ However, Vine claims "Faith that saved produces discipleship. Discipleship depends upon the permanent application of His teaching to oneself."⁵⁹ Vine does not address the significance of John's use of the perfect tense verb. Also, what believer has permanently applied Jesus' teaching to him or herself? The statement in 8:31 emphasizes their continued believing *by means of Him* as the instrument of the revelation regarding His identity as the I AM. If that is not what they believed, then we would have to ask what Jesus said that they did believe? The context seems to demand His claim to be the I AM.

The view of Vine and other commentators reflects a perspective which complicates the idea of salvation, as I previously referenced Bruce and Carson. Does salvation consist of faith plus a commitment to Christ to live as His devoted disciple? While some claim this is the definition of faith, the New Testament presents true believers who do not follow through, and yet their salvation is not questioned. Though this issue is not the topic of this paper, it certainly rests close to the nature of faith. If we redefine faith, we redefine the nature of salvation.

The problem interpreters have with the following context is that Jesus addresses those who have come to believe, but **they** appear to take issue with His promise of freedom (Jh. 8:32-33). This is important because faith must rest in a promise from God which is precisely what Jesus gives them. So, if they have believed with the result that they still believe, then they would believe this promise too, but they appear to resume arguing as they had moments before (cf. 8:13, 19, 25, 27). Referring back to the exchange in John six, the text demonstrates that Jesus' audience consisted of those who believed and those who did not. These two groups even battled⁶⁰ with each other over Jesus' words (Jh. 6:52). In John six the two audiences are more obvious. After Jesus raised Lazarus, those present were divided into those who believed and

⁵⁷ Matthew uses the pluperfect 8 times, Mark 8 times, Luke 15 times, and John. 34 times.

⁵⁸ W.E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine, Vol. 1*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 267.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 267.

⁶⁰ *Machomai μάχομαι* - to fight or argue.

those who went away to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done (Jh. 11:45-46). Peter's audience in Acts two also consists of two groups. Luke identifies the first group as "devout⁶¹ men" (Acts 2:5). They were amazed at that the first disciples spoke the marvelous things of God in their own dialects (2:6-11). These knew of Christ's death but it is the resurrection they needed to hear, and on which Peter focused. He tells them to change their minds and be baptized (2:38). The second group is different⁶² and mock the disciples. In 2:40, Peter strongly testifies to them with many **different**⁶² words, "You be saved from this crooked race/generation." This change indicates that among the crowd were those who were not devout, but they too could hear this message, change their mind and be saved.

Like these other instances, Jesus spoke to a mixed crowd. John tells us that some believed. John does not tell us that Jesus drew that segment aside to give them further instruction. Rather John tells us to whom Jesus addressed the promise of freedom. Only those who have believed in Him have the potential for this freedom. It is not the believers but the others in the crowd—who have not believed—that respond in the remainder of the chapter. Surprisingly, F.F. Bruce appears to take this view, "The polemical tone of the exchange which now follows between Jesus and his hearers makes it difficult to think of those hearers as confined to the Jews who had newly believed in him. At some point early in the exchange the circle of his interlocutors widens; by the time verse 37 is reached, it is unbelieving Jews who are addressed."⁶³ We might wish for John to delineate two groups, but I think he has done so by his use of the perfect tense verb "had come to believe." If they had come to believe, why would they begin arguing with Jesus at this point? John believing too carefully to use the verb lightly of spurious faith.

Simon Magus: believer or unbeliever?

Many Bible interpreters have judged Simon Magnus an unbeliever despite Luke's record in Acts 13. Following Stephen's death, the disciples began to leave Jerusalem as Christ had instructed them. Philip, one of the seven deacons of the Church, traveled north to Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them (Acts 13:5). Philip presented the good news of the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus Christ (13:12). Many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized. Simon had been living among them as an impressive magician doing works of power and amazed the people so that they called him the Great Power of God (13:9-11). When many believed Philip's message, Simon also believed and was baptized (13:13). Luke uses the same aorist tense for the verb *believe* that he used of the other people. However, when Peter and John came and imparted the Spirit by laying hands on people, Simon was amazed and resorted to his old way of thinking. He offered money for the ability. Peter strongly reprimands Simon, some of the language leaving many people in doubt of his salvation.

Despite Luke's words "Simon himself also believed," commentators are quick to judge him an

⁶¹ *Eulabēs* εὐλαβής - ones who "take well" because they are diligent in their service toward God. It describes Simeon in Luke 2, those who buried Stephen in Acts 8, and Ananias who spoke to Paul in Acts 22. Furthermore, another noun form *eulabeia* describes Jesus' actions in Hebrews 5:7.

⁶² *Heteros* ἕτερος - that which is different.

⁶³ Bruce, op cit. p. 197.

unbeliever. They describe his faith as “superficial,”⁶⁴ “inferior to true commitment to Jesus,”⁶⁵ “not unto salvation.”⁶⁶ Robertson claims that Simon did not see his own need for Jesus to be his Saviour.⁶⁷ Gaebelein compares Simon’s faith to that of the Jews in John 2 of which he writes of Jesus, “He knew their believing on Him was not in truth. And so Simon Magus believed in the miracles.”⁶⁸ He goes on, “The attitude of Simon and his **outward profession** must, therefore, have been very cleverly devised.”⁶⁹ (emphasis mine) Toussaint offers seven reasons that he thinks Simon was not born again: “believe” does not always mean saving faith, faith based on signs isn’t trustworthy, Luke never tells us the Simon received the Holy Spirit, Simon remained selfishly focused on power, “repent” is normally addressed to the lost, “perish” in 8:20 is a strong word, Simon is described like a lost man in 8:23.⁷⁰ Polhill says of Simon’s faith, “There is no object given for his believing—no ‘kingdom of God,’ no ‘name of Jesus Christ.’”⁷¹

In response to Toussaint’s reasons, I have already demonstrated that we should take seriously Scripture’s statements about individuals believing. It is not for us to determine if it was genuine faith or false. I have also demonstrated that faith based upon signs should not be considered untrustworthy. Further, Luke does not tell us that Simon believed by seeing the signs. Regarding this I also disagree with Polhill for Luke did not need to repeat the object of Simon’s faith as he had just expressed that object in the previous sentence. Luke gives us no reason to think that Simon’s faith is without proper object. The natural reading would take the object just mentioned to be true of Simon’s faith—an elipsis. Further, the last clause of Acts 8:13 connects with the verb “he was being amazed”, so “seeing the signs and great powers coming to be, he was being amazed.” It does not go with the “he believed.” I agree with Toussaint that Luke does not tell us that Simon received the Holy Spirit, but neither does he tell us that he didn’t at some later point. The nature of the transition from the dispensation of Law to that of Grace made for this unique situation of imparting the Spirit. Christ’s promise of sending the Spirit to be with believers demands that at some point Simon received the Spirit. It is true that repent and the repentance are used mainly of the lost, but neither word is prominent in Acts or the letters to the churches. In the letters to the churches it is most often an appeal to believers, and certainly Simon needed to change his mind about his offer of money for a spiritual ability. The noun “perish” or “ruin” is used in John 3:16, but Paul also uses it of men who plunge into **destruction** by pursuing wealth, a warning he gives to believers, not unbelievers (1 Tim. 6:9). Believers who draw back from God and the assembly of saints come to

⁶⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) p. 186.

⁶⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles in Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, Ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1990) Electronic text hypertexted OakTree Software, Inc.. See also Homer A Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome*, (Winona Lake, IN: BHM Books, 1979) p. 78.

⁶⁶ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961) p. 51).

⁶⁷ Archibald T. Robertson, *Words Pictures in the New Testament, Vol III*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930) p. 105.

⁶⁸ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (New York: Our Hope, 1912) p. 148.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, pp. 148-149.

⁷⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Acts in the Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, eds., (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984) p. 373.

⁷¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts, The New American Commentary, Vol. 26*, (Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1992) p. 217.

ruin (Heb. 10:39). Peter reminds his readers that untaught and unstable people—references to believers—distort all Scripture to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Perish is a strong term for ruin, Peter wants Simon to know, and us as well, that the ability to serve in any genuine capacity cannot be obtained by money. Richard Lenski responds to the many who deny Simon's genuine faith. He summarizes their interpretation, "Then his desire to escape the things about which the apostles have warned him is made proof positive that Simon did not repent at all, and desired only to escape the apostles' threats. No account whatever is taken of the fact that Simon had just recently been brought to faith; in fact, although in v. 13 Luke writes 'he himself came to believe,' this plain assertion is made to mean that he only pretended to believe. It is not to the credit of the exegetes that they allow later tradition not only to modify, but actually to reverse the words of their inspired text."⁷² Eckhard Schnabel accepts Simon's faith to be genuine and adds, "Extraordinary missionary success may be accompanied by instances of believers who have a defective faith. Thus missionary work and pastoral ministry go hand in hand. There will always be people who misunderstand aspects of the gospel, sometimes fundamental truths."⁷³ He then cites Paul having to deal with other believers who carry over wrong ideas and behaviors from their culture.

Simon believed. He believed what Philip proclaimed about the kingdom and Jesus Christ. He even joined close to Philip, a common response of those having just believed (Acts 2:42, 46; 10:48; 13:43; 17:4, 34). Simon did carry over his way of thinking from the past, and it interfered with his new life. However, we should not be so quick to condemn him. In our modern world, men and women pay exorbitant tuitions and give themselves to years of study to gain degrees (B.A., MDiv., ThM., PhD) thinking that these will make them acceptable Bible teachers, and yet teaching is listed by Paul as a God-given, Spirit-given gift which no amount of money can procure.

Believing Pharisees?

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to settle the matter of others imposing law on Paul and Barnabas' message of grace living (Acts 15:1). Though it is not in the scope of this paper to develop this issue in full, Paul explains this matter in Galatians 2. What was at question was their freedom in Christ (Gal. 2:4). Luke describes the issue from the other side's perspective, "Except you are circumcised by the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved" (Acts 15:1). Part of our problem hinges on interpreting the word "saved" as always referring to initial justification before God. However, Luke tells us that those who said this were "brothers." That means they knew that justification was based on faith alone not obedience to Law. What they taught was that the brothers from among the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to go one being saved, or— as we would say—grow. When they arrived in Jerusalem they reported what God did with the Gentiles (Acts 15:4). At this point some rose from the Pharisees who believed and insisted that they circumcise these Gentiles and teach them to keep the Law (15:5). The Jews wanted to enforce the Law's requirement which God prescribed for Gentiles who wished to join the people of Israel. Even in the Old Testament, it

⁷² R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934) p. 327.

⁷³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) pp. 417-418.

was never about eternal salvation, but participating with Israel and sharing their covenant promises. These Pharisees knew this. They were not confused about the gospel for initial salvation. Luke describes them with a perfect participle. They had believed with the result they were believers. Their problem was they did not know that God was no longer imposing His law on anyone. They did not know about living by grace as opposed to law. They were believers like us, but they did not yet know about God's new dispensation of God's grace.

Believing soil: how many really believed?

Of those who believed in Jesus during His earthly ministry, not all stuck it out to the end with Him. Many scattered. This does not mean they were unbelievers, but that they never moved into the sphere of maturity, and never learned to have this freedom. In Luke eight, Jesus told a parable similar to that in Matthew 13. Matthew 13 is about the kingdom from the heavens while the parable in Luke is about the kingdom of God which is the sphere of salvation as it involves people. Jesus interprets the parable in 8:11-15. The first soil represents those who do not believe and Jesus states this (8:12). The second rocky soil represents those who do believe for a season but fall away (8:13). The third weedy soil represents those who do not bear mature fruit (8:14). The fourth good soil holds to the word and bears fruit (8:15). With this parable, Jesus describes four responses to the message of salvation as part of the kingdom of God. One group is never saved. The fourth group holds to the word, so like John 8, His word would be at ease in them, they would be His disciples, learn to have freedom and bear fruit. Jesus never says that the middle two groups were not saved, or lost salvation (not a Scriptural idea), but that one fell away and the other never produced mature fruit. Three of the groups are believers, but only the last goes on to maturity, while the other two never enjoy that promise.

If the last three groups are believers, how are we to understand the second group, concerning which Jesus says they believed for a season but fell away? Though what they had to believe to be saved initially—He is deity, He is Christ—was different than the gospel we believe, they did believe. In contrast to the first group we should understand that when they believed they were saved. I've already established that the promise of salvation for us is not repeated. Once we believe to be saved, we do not go back and repeat that faith to be saved again or to stay saved. So also for this type of person, we should understand that they have believed whatever was necessary to be saved and then continued to live by faith in other promises from God. However, after a season they stop believing those other promises. They fell away from following Jesus as disciples, though they still were saved. The difference between group two and group four is fruit. Not all believers go on to bear mature fruit.

Are Overseers required to have believing children?

In a list of qualifications for elders, Paul includes "having children who believe" [ESV, NASB, NIV] (Tit. 1:6). "Believe" translates the adjective *pistos* [πιστός]. The AV, ASV, NET, NKJV translate this adjective "faithful." Hiebert thinks "believe" is correct, adding "If he is not able to win his own children to faith, how will he lead others to the faith?"⁷⁴ Homer Kent says, "this

⁷⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957) p. 32.

qualification would indicate that the candidate was a careful Christian.”⁷⁵ Such an interpretation assumes that the child is among the “elect” (to use the popular description), or reflects the Arminian view that man’s will can be moved by strong or adequate appeal. Despite these assumptions, such a view does not fit the context. **Faithful** fits better as Paul goes on to describe the children as not accused of recklessness⁷⁶ or insubordination. This also parallels the qualification in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, “Organizing well his own household, having children in submission with all seriousness (now if anyone does not know how to organize his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” Paul says nothing here about “believing” but parallels “faithful” to “with all seriousness.” When their father addresses them, they take him seriously, do what he says and in this way they are faithful or dependable.

This issue involves the range of meaning of the adjective πιστός from “believing” to “faithful” or “dependable.” When Jesus addressed Thomas, He did not tell him to become faithful, but to stop becoming⁷⁷ unbelieving but believing (Jh. 20:27). Luke applies this description to Timothy’s mother, for she was a believing Jew (Acts 16:1). Yet God is not believing but faithful (1 Cor. 1:9). Faithfulness is a requirement for a manager (1 Cor. 4:2), and praised by the Lord of His slaves (Matt. 24:45; 25:21, 23). We must always determine from context which meaning is intended.

The negative adjective ἀπιστός likewise may refer to “unbelieving” or “unfaithful.” Jesus used it of Thomas when he was still unbelieving (Jh. 20:27). Twice Paul uses this adjective to contrast the unbelieving to the believing, describing the latter group with the present active participle πιστεύουσιν (1 Cor. 14:22). He asks “what part has a believing one with an unbelieving one?” (2 Cor. 6:15). A servant that is not doing his master’s will is unfaithful (Lk. 12:46).

Whether an elder’s children or a servant, faithfulness should describe them. However, in the case of Thomas, we would ask how he was becoming unfaithful? Had something been committed to him? Nothing up to that point. In fact a week prior to Thomas seeing Jesus, the other ten disciples saw Jesus but remained in unbelief [ἀπιστέω] (Lk. 24:41). Their unbelief is expressed in verse 11 with an imperfect verb; they were being unbelieving, and in 24:41 a present participle. Unbelief was their problem, not lack of faithfulness.

Unbelieving Believers

One of the problems Timothy faced within the church involved teachings which resulted in the denial of eternal security (as we would call it). Paul encouraged Timothy that everything he (Paul) endured, he did for the sake of the elect (2 Tim. 2:10). The obtaining of salvation rests on Christ Jesus’s work. Paul lists four activities as first class conditions, drawing Timothy in to the

⁷⁵ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958) p. 220.

⁷⁶ The Greeks used *asōtia* ἄσωτία of actions or thinking which were not safe but reckless and squandering.

⁷⁷ See, Dana and Mantey, *The Present Imperative in Prohibitions*, op cit, p. 301. Black writes, “The imperative of prohibition is used with the negative adverb μή and the present imperative to forbid habitual action or, in some instances, to stop an action already in progress.” op cit, p. 100. e.g.’s Eph. 4:28; 2 Cor. 6:14; Jas. 3:1; Eph. 5:17.

discussion with “if.” First, if we have died, also we will live with him (2:11). Die is an aorist active indicative verb meaning Paul considered it certain that we have. In Christ we died (Gal. 2:19-20). It is certain we will live. Second, if we endure or take patiently, we will reign together (2:12a). Endure or take patiently is a present active indicative, so again, Paul assumes we all take at least something patiently. He cannot mean we take everything patiently because even Paul himself encouraged the Lord three times to remove his thorn in the flesh. The assurance is a joint-reign. Third, if we will tell Him, No, He will tell us, No (2:12b). The verb “deny” or “tell, No” is a future middle indicative, so again though future, Paul assumes we will all tell our Lord no at some time. Even Paul did not listen to the Lord when he was told to leave the temple (Acts 22:17-20). We should not expect that He will do what we wish, when we refuse to do what He wishes for us. Finally, if we do not believe, He remains faithful, for He cannot tell Himself-No (2:13). The negative verb ἀπιστοῦμεν is present active indicative, so Paul assumes we all will fail to believe some promise/s which He has made to us. However, He does not return this in kind, because His nature is to be faithful, and therefore, what He promised us, He will do. This is important to the issue of eternal security, so the foundations remain firm (2:19). Paul assumes each statement is true, meaning at some time/s we will not believe.

Faith in Hebrews 11. Why is Genesis 15:6 not mentioned in Hebrews 11?

In Hebrews 11, Paul lists several acts which Abraham did by faith. He omits the account of Abraham in Genesis 15:6, which the New Testament writers quote five times (Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). Why does Paul not include it among the accounts of Hebrews 11? Hebrews 11 gives examples of people acting from faith: Abel brings a sacrifice, Enoch seeks for God, Noah builds an ark, Abraham leaves his country, Israel marches through the sea. In each instance, the individual or individuals had a promise from God, whether we have that promise recorded for us or not, they had a promise. When they believed that promise, they could act upon its reality. If Abraham believed that God would take him to a new place but crossed his legs and sat on the ground, he would not be expressing faith in that promise. If Enoch believed God could be found, but did not look for him, he would not be expressing faith in that promise.

The book of Hebrews appeals for a group of believing Jews to live by faith and grace and not by law (3:1; 4:16). Hebrews is not about initial salvation. The matter addressed is how they will live, not whether they will be forgiven and declared righteous. Therefore, the accounts in Hebrews 11 are of people acting by faith. Believing the gospel is not the point of Hebrews 11.

Initial salvation is never by man’s works to any degree, but by faith alone. By initial salvation,⁷⁸ I mean God’s forgiveness of sins⁷⁹ and declaration of righteousness to the individual who believes. Abraham was justified from faith not from works (Rom. 4:2). Paul then quotes Genesis 15:6 where Abraham responds to God’s promise (Rom. 4:3). He explains in 4:4-5,

⁷⁸ I am distinguishing between salvation broadly which includes God’s ongoing work in believers as well as our future glorification when Christ comes for us.

⁷⁹ One who believes the gospel today receives numerous benefits, but most of them these benefits are taught to the believers after initial faith and as part of his or her Christian life. We present the unbeliever with the promise of righteousness and forgiveness (cp. Acts 10:43; 13:38-39).

“Now to the one working, the reward is not counted according to grace but according to debt. But to the one not working but believing on the one declaring righteous the ungodly, his faith is counted into righteousness.”

Paul says we all came to salvation equally by faith. No one did more. No one did less. As a result this act of faith excludes any works.

Hebrews 11 illustrates faith in life, not initial salvation. God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:6 could not be acted upon. He could only believe it. But when God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, it was not enough for them to sit around and believe that promise. They had to act on it and have sex, because unlike Jesus’ conception, God did not promise a conception without a physical father. Contrast this to Romans 4:5 in which that faith is exercised by one who **does not work**. Hebrews 11 does not address faith for initial salvation, but acts from faith in a specific promises.

God has also promised us that we can do righteousness, and so we have a hope of this righteousness (Gal. 5:5). When we believe that promise, we can then act on that faith through means of love (5:6). “Love” nearly always involves some act done for another. So, Paul encouraged the Galatians to not use their freedom as a base of operation for the flesh, but rather they to serve one another through love (5:13). Serving would be the righteous activity from faith. This is the type of faith Paul illustrates in Hebrews 11. Again, it should not be confused with believing the gospel at the moment of initial salvation.

Faith that works and faith that does not

James 2:14 speaks of faith that is not able to save an individual. This passage has been the focus of much debate regarding the relationship between faith and works in salvation. Proponents of the Lordship salvation position cite James as proof that faith must have works which demonstrate its validity and one’s true commitment to God. This problem exists because people have not considered that one does not have to continue believing every day an every moment in the gospel to be saved. That borders on an Arminian-Wesleyan view expressed Shelton, “This Biblical emphasis on the faith relationship to God places stress on interpersonal trust as the dynamic that unites the believer to Christ. It is through **the maintenance of this faith** relationship that one remains in this covenant of personal fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁰ (emphasis mine) Distinguishing between the initial act of believing and believing in daily life is crucial.

James writes to believing Jewish brothers (1:2, 9, 16, 19; 2:1, 14, 15; 3:1, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19). They have faith concerning their Lord Jesus Christ (2:1), can potentially mature (1:4; 3:2), draw near to God (4:7), and be longsuffering (5:7-8). These scattered brothers have become poor and wish to reclaim what they lost, even if it means speaking ill of brothers, fighting with them in their attempts to gain what the world offers, or moving away to start a business without knowing if it is God’s will (3:9-10; 4:1-3, 13-17).

⁸⁰ R. Larry Shelton, Initial Salvation in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, ed. Charles W. Carter, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) p. 498.

James calls his readers to act upon their faith. Helping in the genuine needs of brothers and sisters in Christ is one such opportunity. However, if a person is chasing wealth, and uses his or her resources to help a needy brother or sister, it diminishes one's bank account and slows "success." In the face of such a need, claiming to have faith but not using that faith benefits no one. It does not benefit the needy, neither does it benefit the one having faith. This passage is a parallel to Galatians 5:5-6 and faith working through love.

This context is not about faith for initial salvation but in the Christian life. Confusing the two causes some interpretations to border on salvation by faith plus works. "Not able to save him" has no reference to eternal salvation and righteousness, but salvation as part of the Christian life or growth. If you don't act on your faith, you cannot be saved or grow in your Christian life. Such actions are practical justification before other people (2:21). Justification before God is not from works (Rom. 4:2, 6), but people can only see our faith by what it does (2:18). Unlike God, we cannot see faith alone and so to us, faith without works is dead "measured⁸¹ by itself." (2:17). If we wish to grow, we need to not only believe God's promises, but to act upon them from faith.

The purpose of John's account

Not every historical record, prophecy or letter of Scripture states its purpose. John does.

So Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (Jh. 20:30-31).

Is John an evangelistic account to encourage initial faith in Christ, or is it a Christian text to encourage faith in Christ on the part of believers? First, when we read of Peter evangelizing in Acts 10 and Paul in Acts 13, both accounts are brief. They are less than a chapter, something communicated in a few minutes, not hours. It does not take twenty chapters to communicate the gospel. Further, many parts of John's account specifically address truth for Christians such as chapters thirteen through seventeen. Nothing in that section addresses the unbeliever. In his introduction, John tells us that as we read his account, we're going to see **the GRACE** and **the TRUTH** as John was privileged to do. **The GRACE** and **the TRUTH** are Christian truths, not for the unsaved. **The GRACE** is about living by grace—"Neither do I, Go, and sin no more"—not becoming a believer by grace. **The TRUTH** is about recognizing what only God can do in our lives, so that we allow Him to do a work through us. John is a book for Christians to see in Christ's earthly life what **the GRACE** and **the TRUTH** looked like in practical terms.

This text involves a textual problem which can affect the meaning. The verb *believe* is either an aorist [πιστεύσῃτε] or a present [πιστεύετε] verb. The textual evidence is so equally divided that the editorial committee of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament inserted the distinguishing letter σ in brackets in the text and gave the reading a C rating, meaning they could not decide between the options.⁸² The aorist would seem to suggest initial

⁸¹ English translations do not represent the preposition **κατά** which has the idea of a measure or standard, in this case the standard is by itself. It needs another standard, that is works, in order for us to see it. So it appears dead.

⁸² Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) pp. xxviii, 256.

faith while the present suggests continued faith as part of the Christian life. However, the aorist subjunctive verb communicates a future idea. However, as outlined in the previous paragraph, John contains too much material intended for believers. Therefore, regardless of the tense of the verb, John's point is to encourage believers to believe that Jesus is the Christ (resurrected one) the Son of God. This last designation is exactly how Paul said he lived, "now I no longer live, but Christ lives in me, and what I live in flesh, I live by faith concerning the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf" (Gal. 2:20). This verse parallels John 20:31 well. We have eternal life because the Son (deity) dwells in us (1 Jh. 5:11). Paul states that his present life is Christ dwelling in Him and that he lives by faith regarding Him as the Son of God. This is Christian truth. John's "you might have life in/by His name" communicates the potential of not acquiring eternal life but of having it in practice, and this can be true whether John used an aorist (probably an Ingressive Aorist-beginning) or a present form of the verb. We need to think seriously about how we use the gospel of John and recognize it is truth intended to encourage Christian faith, not to bring unbelievers to faith.

Summary

God chose Paul to tweak the definition for faith and believing. That change means that while faith in the Old Testament and in the New Testament are very similar, they also have some key differences, such as the role of visible evidence. Faith in the New Testament context is not based on anything visible. Both types of faith were exercised during the Old Testament, but the Gospels demonstrate a type of faith that did seek evidence. This is vital to addressing faith exercised in the Gospels and situations which some might consider to be inauthentic faith.

The noun faith and believe take their objects in different cases. The object of the noun occurs in the genitive case. The object of the verb occurs in the accusative case. This makes sense because a verb normally has an accusative object, while the genitive modifies a noun and in this way expresses its object. The verb also relates to the instrumental case to express the means by which revelation was communicated. Understanding the verb's relationship to its object helps address texts which some have claimed are not true faith, despite the Spirit bearing men along to record it as faith. To believe *into* an individual means that whatever revelation the individual knows he or she accepts so as to believe whatever promise is tied to or rests on the revelation. This means that one may believe at one point and believe later as more revelation is given. The royal official at Capernaum and the disciples illustrate this. This also supports the distinction between faith at the beginning and subsequent acts of faith in the Christian life. Ignoring this distinction can lead to questioning some people's salvation.

Faith is an important idea in Scripture. God saves through faith alone. For the New Testament believer, faith is a key attitude for daily living. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Yet certain theological biases regarding the nature of those who are saved have affected how many interpret some references to faith. It is better to distinguish faith in different objects at different times, and the nature of faith prior to and during this present dispensation. When we understand how the Spirit produces faith as part of the fruit, we can choose to live by faith in God's promises. We can live by faith in this present dispensation of grace and live out love (1 Tim. 1:4-5). We can believe God's promises of assurance so as to have an obedience which comes from faith rather than from fear (Rom. 16:25-26).