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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Salvation by Faith or Faithfulness?

Refuting common objections to unconditional security

By Ditmar Hoxha (with editorial contributions by Donny Budinsky)

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A significant portion of the material in this article is excerpted from my book, *Power Unto Salvation: A Defense of Free Grace Theology*.¹ Specific references to my work are not repeated with in-text citations for the sake of brevity.

Prelude | By Donny Budinsky

In the Once Saved Always Saved camp—where salvation is understood to be by faith-alone and cannot be lost even if a believer fails to persevere in good works—there are three common viewpoints.

Some would argue that ongoing belief is not required for salvation but that it will *inevitably* take place due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. According to this view, there are boundaries to how far a believer would fall. In other words, proponents of this viewpoint argue that genuine believers will always have some kind of propositional alignment or belief in the truth of Christ and his message—but may not necessarily continue in good works in this life.

The second position argues that it is *probable* believers will remain in belief unto death—but hypothetically (although not necessarily likely) if they were to fall away—they'd still be saved. This is more of a reserved approach bridging the other two views. This article will try to express the arguments why salvation is not contingent on ongoing belief from this perspective, (e.g., “If a believer were to stop believing they would still be saved, as seen in John 3:18.”). This is the position the editor currently holds.

The third dominant view is the one held by the author and those who embrace the title of Free Grace. They defend the idea that genuine believers can totally abandon the faith—a real phenomenon they claim *can* and *does* take place—and still remain saved based on their initial moment of belief. The author, Ditmar Hoxha, argues for this position as being the most consistent and defensible position, but the arguments in this article can be utilized by anyone who holds to either of the three stances or is unsure which is true.

Each of these viewpoints have their assembly of evidence, but the aim of this article is not to analyze each of these stances inside the faith alone community. Although some sections lean towards the third view (i.e., section 3.2), the article is intended to offer a comprehensive counter to the “faithfulness” assertion that seeks to support itself by looking to Greek grammar.

What we want to establish is the reality that those who argue for faithfulness (defining it as ongoing belief, obedience, and endurance) as a compulsory condition to be saved have a false soteriological model. From here, those that believe correctly on the one-time nature of saving belief can engage in-house differences to come to the best possible soteriological understanding of whether such a person *would* later fall away.

One of the primary goals of this article is to offer a go-to resource for everybody on this topic. When you are presented with common objections (such as the “faithfulness/ongoing obedience” argument) to salvation by faith alone and the eternal security of the believer (Once Saved Always Saved), please utilize the reliable material in this piece to thoroughly refute these spurious assertions. I can assure you as somebody contributing (editorial input) to this valuable resource,

¹ D. Hoxha, *Power Unto Salvation: A Defense of Free Grace Theology* (2024).

those of a differing soteriological persuasion will have an extremely difficult time refuting the content.

This article was designed by the author to leave no stone unturned on the subject. This puts those that hold to conditional security (and other misleading forms of soteriology) on the defense. The ball is in their court to refute these well-researched arguments. Let's see if they can step up to the plate and defend their points in a sophisticated manner.

1.1 | Salvation through belief in Christ

To frame this discussion, a summary of what one must do to be saved seems appropriate. Among dozens of other scriptures, Acts 16:30-31 and John 3:16 exemplify that belief is the sole condition to obtain salvation or eternal life. In Acts 16:30, the jailer poses the following question to Paul: “...what must I do to be saved?” To which, Paul and Silas respond, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

The nature of this question (“what must I do?”) entails that the response must include all of the necessary requirements to obtain salvation. If Paul and Silas do not respond by including all of the necessary things one must do to be saved, their response would be a lie. For example, imagine for a moment that you asked your Biochemistry professor, “what must I do to bring my grade up from a C to an A by the end of the semester?” After crunching the numbers, the professor finds that you would need to ace *all* of your future exams with an A *and* complete all of your homework assignments. Assuming strict adherence to the rubric and grading system, if the professor responded by stating, “complete all of your homework assignments and you will obtain an A,” he would have lied. Similarly, if belief alone is not enough to be saved, Paul would have lied in Acts 16. Jesus also would have lied by stating, “he that believeth on me hath everlasting life,” noting no other condition (John 6:47). If a person believes and does not obtain everlasting life, Jesus would have lied.

Since this much is clear, defining the *nature* of this saving belief is essential. Conditionalists (those who believe a person can lose their salvation *or* do not obtain it until the end) and Reformed individuals (those who hold that ‘true’ belief necessarily results in faithful perseverance until the end) seek to define this belief in a way that extends beyond an initial persuasion that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. Not all conditionalists redefine the word *believe* in the same way, but the word is generally redefined to mean *faithfulness*. The way this argument manifests varies based on who you ask; some may define faithfulness to merely include a continued persuasion of the truth of the gospel, while others may seek to include lifestyle reformation, good works, and a turning from sins into that definition. However, one consistent theme arises. To these individuals, saving belief is an *ongoing* action, not merely an initial reception of the gospel (after which no action must necessarily follow). Irrespective of how one defines *faithfulness*, this article will seek to refute any notion that saving belief is ongoing. There are three primary categories of evidence that conditionalists cite to support the idea that saving belief means faithfulness.

1. Grammatical arguments.
 - a. The Greek present tense.
 - b. The Greek participle.
2. The definitions of *pisteuō* and *pistis*.
3. Other allegedly anti-eternal security scriptures.

Let’s begin by addressing the grammatical arguments, after which we will examine the abundant evidence proving that saving belief cannot mean faithfulness in parts 2 and 3.

1.2 | Grammatical arguments | The Greek present tense

One common grammatical argument is that the Greek present tense indicates ongoing or continuous action. Based on this, some argue that when the present tense is used with *pisteuō* (to believe), it must mean that continued belief is required for eternal life (e.g., in John 3:16). However, this interpretation is an oversimplification of how the Greek present tense functions. The present tense in Greek often conveys aspect (the nature of the action) rather than strict time duration; while it *can* indicate continuous or habitual action—as we will observe, it can also describe a general truth, classification, or a single action depending on context.

The tense argument on its own cannot prove that *pisteuō* encompasses obedience to God’s commandments, a ‘living relationship’, or any number of things that people propose are implicated in the word. Multiple of these arguments are often synthesized to both redefine *what* saving belief encompasses and prove its ongoing nature. If a conditionalist or Reformed individual acknowledges (as many Greek grammarians rightly do) that the present tense does not *necessarily* indicate ongoing action, they would then need to provide *other* contextual reasons why *pisteuō* in John 3:16 should be understood as continuous belief. It is curious, however, that some of the quotes I will present dogmatically assert that the present tense refers to continuous action, without offering any qualifiers—such as why it applies in *this* particular instance or acknowledging that this is *one* of its possible usages. Instead, they present it as an absolute: *this tense refers to continuous action*. This approach, which is not uncommon, seems either a deliberate misrepresentation of its function or a misunderstanding of Greek grammar.

In Steve Witzki’s article, “Is Saving Faith the Act of a Moment or the Attitude of a Life?”, he cites numerous Bible scholars and theologians, all of whom articulate the same fundamental argument.² His follow-up article, “Saving Faith is the Attitude of a Life—The Scholarly Evidence,” offers additional quotations, though some overlap with his first piece.³ Neither article presents a broad spectrum of biblical evidence; in fact, the content of both could likely be condensed into one page without omitting the majority of their arguments. Witzki’s focus is almost *solely* on the present participle form of *pisteuō* and displaying scholarly agreement that it denotes ongoing belief.

Each quote essentially reinforces the same point: that the present tense and participle signify continuous faith. To illustrate how Witzki frames this argument, I will cite the quotes I found to be most comprehensive. These should encapsulate nearly all of the arguments Witzki presents:

Bible scholar Robert Shank notes the following regarding John 5:24:

[One must take] into account the durative [continuous] quality of the present participles akouōn [“hearing”] and pisteuōn [“believing”] . . . Jesus declares that the happy circumstance

² S. W. Witzki, *Saving Faith: Act of a Moment or Attitude of a Life?* (2009), <https://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Saving-Faith-Act-of-a-Ment-or-Attitude-of-a-Life.pdf>.

³ S. Witzki, *Saving Faith is the Attitude of a Life: Scholarly Evidence*, n.d., <http://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Saving-Faith-is-the-Attitude-of-a-Life-Scholarly-Evidence.pdf>.

of deliverance from present condemnation and of standing passed out of death into life is the privilege only of such as habitually hear His word and believe the Father. It is only on the basis of present hearing and believing that one shares the eternal life of God and enjoys deliverance from present condemnation and spiritual death.⁴

James White, a Calvinist and a popular modern apologist, clearly articulates this argument:

When Jesus describes the one who comes to Him and who believes in Him, He uses the present tense to describe this coming, believing, or, in other passages, hearing or seeing. The present tense refers to a continuous, ongoing action...The wonderful promises that are provided by Christ are not for those who do not truly and continually believe. The faith that saves is a living faith, a faith that always looks to Christ as Lord and Savior...Many in our world today...teach essentially that a person can perform an act of believing on Christ once, and after this, they can fall away even into total unbelief and yet still supposedly be “saved.”...Christ does not save men in this way. The true Christian is the one continually coming, always believing in Christ. Real Christian faith is an ongoing faith, not a one-time act. If one wishes to be eternally satiated, one meal is not enough. If we wish to feast on the bread of heaven, we must do so all our lives. We will never hunger or thirst if we are always coming and always believing in Christ.⁵

Lutheran scholar Richard Lenski states:

The [Greek] present tense [verb *ho pisteuōn*, “the believing”] describes the person by its durative [i.e., continuing] action. . . . The verb [*echē*, “have”] matches the durative [*pisteuōn*, “believing”]. The believer has life the moment he believes and as long as he believes...While its nature is “eternal” and deathlessness, it may be lost during our stay in this sinful world, but only by a willful and wicked cutting of the bond “in him,” a deliberate renunciation and destruction of faith.⁶

Paul T. Butler states: “We must note that the promise of eternal life is to whosoever continues to believe in the Son. The word ‘believe’ is in the Greek present tense, and indicates continued action.”⁷ Witzki even cites Butler as stating that the participle (*pisteuon*) can *only* and exclusively mean continuing action. It seems odd that Witzki would include quotes that appear to contradict his claim that most grammarians acknowledge the present tense is not exclusively used for continuous action, especially considering the dogmatic—and at times absolute (as in Butler’s

⁴ Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield, Mo: Westcott Pub, 1961), 60-61.

⁵ *Drawn by the Father* (Lindenhurst: Reformation Press, 2000), 19-20.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 257-258.

⁷ P. T. Butler, *The Gospel of John, Vol. 1: A New Commentary Workbook Teaching Manual* (1961).

case)—approach taken by those asserting the present tense always refers to ongoing action.⁸ D. Edmond Hiebert says something similar on 1 John 5:10-12:

The [Greek present] participle, “the one who believes”...portrays the individual as exercising a continuing faith centered on the Son of God...It involves not merely an acceptance of the truthfulness of the message but also a personal trust in or committal to the One to whom witness is borne. The expression “believes in the Son”...pictures faith as moving toward and resting on the Son...The present tenses mark this possession of life as a present reality. It is only through this close and living union between Christ and the believer that eternal life can be experienced.⁹

Witzki also introduces peripheral arguments, emphasizing how frequently this tense is used when compared to the aorist (which he, along with those he cites, mistakenly interprets as indicating a one-time action). However, these supplementary claims carry little evidentiary weight if the present tense does not inherently imply ongoing action, something even Witzki acknowledges.

Not only do these arguments misrepresent how Greek verb tenses function, but they also rely heavily on implication and subtle inferences (i.e., “Easter eggs”) instead of explicit contextual evidence that defines *pisteuō*. Before one can assert that the present participle in John 3:16 refers to ongoing belief, the context (not its frequency of usage or “Easter eggs”) must first substantiate this interpretation. Without establishing this foundation, any claims about the frequency of present tense usage in contrast to other tenses, like the aorist, are irrelevant. Arguments related to this tense’s proximity to key phrases also rely heavily on implication and are circular at their foundation. Worse yet, since the present tense is *not* the only tense used in these ways, this argument invalidates itself. Even *if* the present tense predominated, this type of argument would lack hermeneutical weight.

J. Harold Greenlee, a respected Greek scholar from the mid-20th to early 21st century, offers an example of this type of argument. His reasoning is, in fact, circular, while also misrepresenting the function of Greek verb tenses:

There is one context, however, in which *believe* is always used with the tense of continuing action in the New Testament and never with the tense of completed action. There are the passages in which the believing is said to give eternal life...There are two important facts concerning salvation involved in the verb believe in the New Testament. In the first place, although both tenses are used, the form meaning to continue to believe is used almost twice as often as the form meaning one act of faith. In the second place, and even more significantly, in every passage in the New Testament where believing is clearly spoken of as leading to eternal life, it is the tense of continuing action which is used for believe. The tense describing a single act of faith describes the initial action of faith whereby we become saved. This is the sense of Acts 16:31, for example. Here the Philippian jailer has asked Paul what

⁸ Witzki, *Saving Faith: Act of a Moment or Attitude of a Life?*, p.30.

⁹ "An Exposition of 1 John 5:1-12," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (April-June 1990): 228-230.

he must do to “become saved (single action), and Paul replies, “Believe (exercise an act of faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved (become converted). It is likewise the sense of Ephesians 1:13, “...after you believed (became converted), you were sealed with the Holy Spirit;”...This tense is used of the exercise of an act of faith to become converted, to secure healing, or with regard to some other particular purpose. On the other hand, in every clear instance in the New Testament in which “believing” is said to produce eternal life or final salvation, the [Greek present] tense of continuing action is used: for example, John 3:16, “everyone who believes and continues to believe”...Since all of the certain examples associated with eternal life are passages which have the [present] tense of continuing action . . . the New Testament writers surely must have thought of eternal life as coming from a continuing faith.¹⁰

Firstly, the *aorist* is not the “tense of completed action”, nor is the *present* “the tense of continuing action.” Such a description is an oversimplification of the nuanced functions of Greek grammar; if Greenlee’s prior findings rely on this premise, it is hardly a compelling argument. As we will see, the aorist tense can refer to continuous action and the present tense to one-time action. Additionally, the aorist tense is indeed used in key eternal salvation passages in John, along with other books (1:7, 6:50-58, 8:24, 12:40-42, 20:31).

What if the New Testament authors intended to use the present tense to convey the definitive, one-time nature and classification of *the one who believes*? Since this interpretation falls within the possible range of meanings of the present tense—and, in fact, is a better way to articulate such a concept—it is entirely plausible. The mere frequency or proximity of the present tense (i.e., of *pisteuō*) does *nothing* to disprove this assertion, as it would be circular reasoning to assume *a priori* that it refers to ongoing action. If proven that it does not refer to ongoing action, then these numbers (which are weak hermeneutical evidence anyway), would shift towards the other end.

Fred Chay, who has written an excellent (and brief) book titled *The Faith That Saves*, outlines the folly of this type of logic in his critique of Greek scholar Daniel B. Wallace: “We can look at his reasoning that reduces to three points based on the formal use of the present tense and statistical function: a. Both aorist and present participles depict believers, b. Present participles are more common (statistically) for *πιστεύων*, c. Therefore, believing is necessarily continuous action.”¹¹ Not only is this based on the faulty understanding that the present tense necessarily conveys continuing action, but Chay forms a parallel syllogism to prove its fallacious nature:

The three points resemble Wallace's case *πιστεύων*: a. Both aorist and present participles depict Divorcers, b. Present participles are more common for *ἀπολύω*, c. Therefore, divorcing is necessarily continuous action [?!]....He should not state that a present participle does not prove continuous action, and then turn around and refute his own claim that it

¹⁰ *Words from the Word: 52 Word Studies from the Original New Testament Greek*, 49-52, 11-12.

¹¹ Fred Chay, *The Faith That Saves: The Nature of Faith in the New Testament—An Exegetical and Theological Analysis on the Nature of New Testament Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), p.50.

does, "especially in soteriological contexts in the NT." This is a classic case of special pleading... The danger of placing too fine a point on grammar to make a dogmatic and absolute theological pronouncement can be seen above. It is one of the dangers that an exegete must be aware of, lest their theology direct their exegesis and turn it into eisegesis. Wallace has read a continual belief into John 3: 16 where his own grammar denies that use... it becomes clear that it is dangerous indeed to assume that the normative use of the word *πιστεύων* is always continuous action, especially in light of the fact that it cannot even be assumed that the present tense in general assumes continuous aspect.¹²

Furthermore, Greenlee begs the question by creating categories where *pisteuō* refers to eternal life-granting-faithfulness in some cases and to initial faith in others. Free Grace theology asserts that these are effectively one and the same, where the condition for both initial and final salvation (i.e., glorification) is met in a single moment of faith. Any distinction between types of salvific belief or salvation itself must first be demonstrated (without an improper representation of the Greek grammar), rather than assumed. For instance, Acts 16:31 speaks of the same gift of *positional salvation* that eternal life and imputed righteousness describe (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 5:14-18, 5:21, 6:23; Acts 10:43, 13:38-39, 16:31). It is inconsistent for Greenlee to define *saved* merely as "becoming converted" in Acts 16, where *pisteuō* is understood as initial faith—while interpreting *eternal life* elsewhere as a different kind of salvation that must be continually maintained through persevering belief.

Curiously, after citing Greenlee on the nature of Acts 16:31, Witzki cites scholar Daniel Steele who interprets Romans 1:16, 4:24-25, and 10:4 as referring to "future and eternal salvation".¹³ To be consistent with this argument, Steele also likely believes that Acts 16:31 addresses a distinct initial conversionary salvation. This is seemingly based on the biased implications drawn from the fact that Romans 1 uses the present active participle while Acts 16 uses the aorist tense. But what if they are discussing the same concept of salvation and type of belief? How could this be disproven without begging the question, especially when Greenlee and Steele are misusing the grammar to begin with? Not only does this circularity render such an argument virtually worthless, but when we examine the contexts of the passages proposed as *eternal salvation* (e.g., Rom 3:22,28; 4:5,24), it becomes abundantly clear that even this 'type of belief' cannot mean ongoing faithfulness. This leaves no room for creating false categories of belief or distinctions in what type of salvation they yield. The salvation discussed in Romans 4 is distinct from adherence to God's commandments, which will later be shown to include loving God, loving one's neighbor, and turning from sin—all things many of these scholars will try to include in what it means to *continue to believe*. The context surrounding Acts 16:31 (e.g., 13:38-39, 15:5-11, 16:17) and other passages that use the aorist form of *pisteuō* or its synonyms (e.g., John 1:12, 6:50-53, 20:31) further display that they discuss eternal salvation.

¹² Chay, *The Faith That Saves*, p.51-52.

¹³ Witzki, *Saving Faith: Act of a Moment or Attitude of a Life?*, p.30

The present tense: Let's begin by establishing that the present tense in Greek does not *necessarily* indicate continuous action. Although the function of the present tense is notably different from the English present, the latter isn't always used to indicate continuous action either. For example, when someone says, "I believe you," it doesn't necessarily imply that they must continue believing indefinitely—it simply states a fact at that moment. "Whoever harms the police will go to jail," or "whoever drinks this glass of water will die," can both convey a general truth that applies even with a one-time completion of that respective action.

In Luke 6:29, Jesus states, "and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." The verbs "smiteth" (*typto*) and "taketh away" (*airo*) are both present active participles (more on participles shortly). Jesus is not instructing you to *continually* offer up your other cheek to the one that *continues* to strike you. Even one strike is sufficient to perform the principle of turning your other cheek. The focus is on "the one who strikes" as the one *classified* by striking you (even once), rather than on a continual striking. This is best exemplified in the verb *airo*, translated "taketh away" in the second half of the verse. The person who steals your cloak cannot continually take away a cloak he has already taken. Thus, this action is also a one time event.

In Matthew 7, Jesus states the following:

Matthew 7:7-8: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

The verbs *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* are all in the present tense in Greek, along with their participle forms (the one that *asks*, *seeks*, and *knocks*). The focus of this principle is not on Jesus commanding you to *continue* to seek or continue to ask. Rather, it is a general truth or principle that applies even to a person who asks once. You do not necessarily need to continue asking to receive something, nor do you need to continue knocking for a door to be opened to you. In fact, if you knock once, Jesus will open the door. If the purpose of the present tense here were to convey continual action, then without specifying a duration, it could imply that you must incessantly knock or ask for the remainder of your life, which is illogical. The most plain understanding we can extract is the truthful principle that, when you ask, you receive.

The aorist tense: Those who misrepresent the present tense to mean continued belief also often misunderstand the aorist tense. It typically presents the action as a whole (or with a summary view), meaning it is not concerned with the duration, repetition, or completion of the action. It emphasizes the fact that the action occurred from whatever vantage point of time it is being portrayed. This does not mean the aorist necessarily conveys one-time action, although it is typically rendered in the simple past tense in English. Thomas Stegall has an excellent article titled "Clarifying the Misunderstood Present Tense," in which he covers in great detail the misconceptions surrounding not only the present tense, but also the participle and aorist tense. In it he states:

...the aorist tense can be used for continuous action that is perceived and portrayed from a more remote vantage point. An example of the latter occurs in Revelation 20:4...Here, the aorist tense is used to remotely summarize, from a vantage point outside of the millennium, the continual living and reigning that will occur within that timeframe, like viewing a parade from a helicopter where you can see the entire parade from start to finish. This use of the aorist tense is not uncommon in the New Testament, nor is the use of the present tense for momentary, non-repetitive action, such as in Matthew 3:13: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.” The word “came” (*paraginetai*) is in the present tense, which certainly does not mean that Jesus “was continually or habitually arriving” at the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist....—the verb’s *Aktionsart* or kind of action (whether habitual or momentary) is not determined by the verb’s tense but by the *context* in which the verb occurs and by the *lexical meaning* or nature of the verb itself. In the context, there may be adverbs or prepositional phrases that modify the verb and provide clues to its duration or kind of action (e.g., “immediately,” “at once,” “in that hour,” “continually”). Some verbs by their very nature tend to express action that is either more momentary or continual. For instance, the verb for “crucify” (*stauroō*) inherently depicts a one-time act based on the nature of crucifixion leading to imminent death...Though the verb for “crucify” (*stauroō*) normally occurs in the aorist-tense form, it occasionally occurs in the present-tense form (Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:21), showing that the present tense can certainly be used to portray a one-time event.¹⁴

Just like the present tense can have a range of usages in Greek, so can the Aorist, which is sometimes claimed to refer strictly to momentary or past action. Under this misconception, some (like Greenlee) claim that there are few to no examples of *pisteuō* in the aorist tense—particularly when talking about eternal life or ‘final salvation’—and therefore that the present tense is used to demonstrate the ongoing nature of saving faith.¹⁵ However, *pisteuō* is used interchangeably in the aorist tense over 30 times in the gospel of John (e.g., 10:42, 11:45, 12:42). Metaphors or synonyms for belief in John’s Gospel are also commonly rendered in the aorist tense (1:12, 4:14, 6:53). John 1:12 in particular uses both the aorist and present-tense forms when equating those who *received* Christ with those who “*believe* on his name”. Other key belief passages like Acts 16:30-31 also render *pisteuō* in the aorist tense. Chay also states the following about John 1:7 (“...to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might *believe*”):

¹⁴ Thomas Stegall, "Misunderstood Greek Present Tense, Thomas Stegall," *Verse by Verse Commentary*, February 8, 2019, <https://versebyversecommentary.com/articles/problem-passages/misunderstood-greek-present-tense-thomas-l-stegall/>.

¹⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 621 n. 22.

John uses the aorist subjunctive in John 1:7 when stating what the goal of Jesus' ministry would be. It would appear that John is not concerned so much with whether a person continues believing, as much as whether or not belief has occurred.¹⁶

Under the assumption that the present tense necessarily indicates continual belief, Paul and Silas should have used the present tense instead of the aorist in Acts 16:31, or added clear qualifiers of duration like “believe *until the end*,” or “continue *to* believe.” In 2 Thess 1:10, Paul could have also opted to use the present tense, but instead uses the aorist to convey that the reason the Thesalonians will be saved from eternal judgement is “because our testimony among you was believed”.

2 Thessalonians 1:10: When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe _{Pap} (because our testimony among you was believed _{Aorist})

With a fallacious view of these tenses, where the aorist is understood to mean momentary action, and the present tense is understood as continual action—Paul should have used the present-tense of *pisteuō* to convey that “the testimony is still being believed” as the reason for their salvation, but instead he cites their initial belief in the testimony (2 Thess 1:8, Acts 17:1-4). The proper understanding of both the aorist and the present tense are that they are not restricted in their *Aktionsart*, and can convey both continuous *and* momentary action. Another noteworthy feature of 2 Thess 1:10 is that Paul classifies “the believer” (present active participle) as one who “has believed” the gospel. If the present active participle of *pisteuō* necessarily conveyed ongoing belief, why does Paul define the Thessalonians as “the believing ones” on account of the fact that they had *believed* the gospel?

¹⁶ Chay, *The Faith That Saves*, p.46.

1.3 | Grammatical arguments | The Greek participle

Greek participles are often rendered with an -ing ending in English (e.g., *believ-ing*), which leads some, like Rev. Ian Chew, to mistakenly assume they always indicate continuous or ongoing action:

Yet a more proper translation of the verse from the Greek ought to be: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever *believes* and *goes on believing* in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is because the tense of the verb “believe” in Greek (“*pisteuōn*”) is actually in the present participle active tense signifying a continuous or ongoing action. This has great significance to our understanding of what constitutes salvation. It tells us that our faith in Christ should *not be limited to* a one-time decision made in the past to believe but is an ongoing relationship of trust in Christ every moment of each day. It reminds us that salvation is a continuing journey of faith from the beginning to the end till we meet Jesus.¹⁷

In reality, the participle’s meaning depends on its context and function within the sentence. In John 3:16 and John 3:18, the participle (*pisteuōn* — “believing”) is a present active participle. However, because it is paired with a definite article (*ὁ πιστεύων*), it functions as a substantival participle, meaning that it behaves like a noun and is often translated as “the one who believes” or “the believer.” Some interpret this phrase as “the one who continues to believe has eternal life,” but this interpretation is an overextension of the participle’s function.

The present participle does not necessarily convey continuous action unless the context *explicitly* demands it. For instance, in John 3:16, the phrase (*pas ho pisteuōn*) simply means “everyone who believes” without inherently specifying whether that belief is a one-time act or an ongoing process. The context of the passage determines whether the belief is continuous, something we will closely examine in part 2. Mandating that salvation is conditional on sustained belief is not *necessitated* by Greek grammar, making this argument extremely weak.

In Mark 6:14 “John the Baptist”, who was already dead at this point in Mark’s gospel, is referred to using the present participle *baptizōn* (“the baptizing one”, or “the one who baptizes”). This refers to John’s past role, not an ongoing action.¹⁸

In Matthew 5:28, Jesus states, “...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The verb *blepō* is in the present active participle form (functioning as a substantival participle), which could be understood as “the one who looks.” However, this need not imply ongoing or continuous looking with lust—a single instance of looking with lust is sufficient to be considered as having committed adultery in the heart. This is shown by the completion of the action in the second part of the verse, where “hath committed adultery” indicates a past action that was completed. The same can be said four verses later about the one who divorces his wife.

¹⁷ Isaac Chew, “The Importance of the Continuous Tense,” *Ascension*, 2024, <https://ascension.org.sg/the-importance-of-the-continuous-tense/>.

¹⁸ Shawn Elkins, “Is ‘Continuous’ Believing Required for the New Birth?” *Faith Alone*, 2021, <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/is-continuous-believing-required-for-the-new-birth/>.

Thus, the participle *blepōn* (the one who looks) refers to an action that, once performed (even just once), is already deemed sinful (as adultery), not requiring continuous action. The examples previously cited from Luke 6:29 and Matthew 7:7-8 also demonstrate this well—“the one that takes away your cloak” or “the one that knocks” both refer to a one time action and function as substantival participles. Similarly, one-time belief, when applied to *pisteuōn* (the one who believes), results in everlasting life. The focus in both cases is not on the duration or repetition of the action but on the *consequence* of performing it. The present participle can refer to a role, an identity, a classification, or a completed action (like having believed). The one that has believed is no longer classified as one that “hath not believed” (John 3:18); his identity is now “the believer”, even if he ceases to continually believe. Fred Chay states that, “the attributive present participle as a point of grammar says nothing about either the continuation or the repetition of the action.”¹⁹ Stegall’s notes support this:

Even if an action occurs once, that solitary act can identify the entire person and serve as a descriptive title for that person. Thus, Adam’s one act of sin was enough to identify him thereafter as “a sinner” and all of his descendants as “sinners” (Romans 5:17-19). Similarly, James 2:10-11 states that a person who breaks God’s law only once is “guilty of all.” The person who violates God’s law is known as a “transgressor,” regardless of whether he broke God’s law once or a thousand times. According to these passages, all it takes is one sin for a person to be justly counted as a “sinner” or “transgressor” in God’s sight. Virtually all proponents of the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints agree with this point as it pertains to original sin. They also readily agree that in our society a person’s one-time donation is enough to identify him thereafter as a “benefactor.” But if perseverance advocates are willing to acknowledge these examples to be true, why do they deny that one act of belief is enough to constitute a person a “believer” in God’s sight?²⁰

Summary of part 1

- Both the present and aorist tense, along with their participle forms, are frequently misunderstood. The present participle does not *necessarily* represent continuous action, but can instead convey a one-time action or classification established by a single act.
- Since the grammatical argument alone does little to prove the continuous nature of saving belief, the focus should be placed on other kinds of hermeneutical evidence to demonstrate that *pisteuō* refers to ongoing belief (i.e., direct context). Parts 2 and 3 of this article will provide the evidence supporting the Free Grace understanding of saving faith as a one-time action.

¹⁹ Chay, *The Faith That Saves*, p.48.

²⁰ Stegall, "Misunderstood Greek Present Tense."

2.1 | The biblical definitions of *pisteuō* and *pistis*

Some conditionalists propose that the noun *pistis* (faith/belief) and verb *pisteuō* (believe) necessarily or *intrinsically* convey the meaning of faithfulness or continued obedience. In Witzki's article, Turner and Mantey are cited as saying, "Faith *in* and faithfulness *to* are inherent in the noun (*pistis*) and the verb (*pisteuō*)."²¹ Since this argument extends to the noun form of belief/faith (*pistis*), it is a distinct argument from the verb-related grammatical arguments. Conditionalists often combine lexical and grammatical arguments to support the claim that saving belief requires ongoing faithfulness. However, if one clear instance can be provided where these terms do not mean faithfulness or continued obedience, the argument weakens drastically. That would show that *pistis* and *pisteuō* do not intrinsically carry the meaning of faithfulness, making context the determining factor in whether these words refer to ongoing faithfulness or a simple one-time act of trust or belief.

2.1a | Belief & Faith contrasted with obedience to God's commandments

The New Testament frequently contrasts obeying God's commandments (works of the law) with saving *pistis* and *pisteuō* (Rom 4:5, Acts 15:5-11, Eph 2:8-9, etc.), demonstrating that saving faith cannot encompass these actions. All redefinitions of saving faith beyond a mere initial belief in the truth of the gospel would be classified as faithfulness or ongoing belief. However, depending on what soteriological system one subscribes to (Calvinism, Arminianism, Lordship salvation, etc.), the definition of saving *pisteuō* (John 3:16) may vary.

While this article provides enough evidence to counter virtually all the ways one can redefine saving faith, it is still valuable to establish a biblical definition of faithfulness. Faithfulness should not be defined in a manner inconsistent with scripture.

Defining faithfulness: Conditionalists and Reformed individuals fall under two primary categorical interpretations of faithfulness. The first views it as continuous propositional belief in the truth of the gospel, apart from any moral behavior or good works. Under this definition, a person could continue to believe in the truth of Christ's atoning death and resurrection—live an abundantly immoral life, devoid of any good works, or even public profession of faith—yet *still* be considered faithful. The second, more comprehensive understanding sees faithfulness as involving both continued propositional belief and obedience to God's commands—such as performing good works, turning from sin, and living a life reflective of Christ's teachings. This second view aligns with Hebrews 11, in which saints like Abraham used their faith to obey God's commandments, thus being considered "faithful Abraham" (Gal 3:9). Although conditionalists in the second category often differ on questions like, "How many good works?" or "How much obedience?," this is largely irrelevant because, as we will see, saving faith cannot mix even a hint of continued obedience to God's commandments.

Some in the second group may even define propositional belief in the truth of the gospel as being *one and the same* as continued obedience, which is false but consistent with their theology. If

²¹ S. Witzki, *Saving Faith is the Attitude of a Life: Scholarly Evidence*, p.15.

someone concedes that belief in the gospel can exist *apart* from works or obedience in *at least one sense*, it implicitly acknowledges that faith, at its core, is not synonymous with moral behavior—especially when you consider the scriptural basis for that distinction.

The Bible defines faithfulness as continual obedience to God's commandments and a commitment to living out the principles of the faith, including godly living, doctrinal soundness, enduring persecution, and evangelism (Rev 2:10, Acts 16:15, Eph 1:1, Col 1:2, 1 Cor 4:1-2). Faithfulness (*pistos*) can refer to reliability, but in the context of “keeping the faith” it is *always* represented as a state of being obedient to God. Although this does not entail perfection, a faithful believer is one that is classified as obedient across all matters.

A disciple, one that follows Christ, is a perfect example of a faithful believer. Discipleship is costly and involves forsaking family (Luke 14:26-28, 33), bearing lots of fruit (or good works, John 15:8), sacrificing your life for Christ (Mark 8:34-35), and selling your possessions to give to the poor (Mark 10:21), among other things.

Even if we accept the flawed (and less frequent) definition of faithfulness as a continual propositional belief in the gospel, it effectively morphs into the other definition. Sustaining such belief over years or decades is difficult. Believers face tribulations (John 16:33), worldly temptations (Luke 8:13-14), and false gospels (2 Pet 2:1), all of which can make a believer lose their faith. To persist in faith, one must be resilient, actively study to avoid deception, resist the fleshly desires of the world, and endure persecution. Without this effort, there's a real risk of falling away. Hebrews 4:11 directs believers to *labor* or risk falling away in unbelief. Therefore, even this proposed definition of *pistēō* necessitates labor and obedience to God's commandments to some degree.

Defining works of the law: Before examining key scriptures that contrast obeying God's commandments with saving faith (e.g., Gal 2:16; Rom 3:28, 4:5, 10:4; Acts 15:5-11) we should first define “works of the law” in these contexts. Many try to limit the scope of the law in these verses because, if it includes God's moral commandments, the clear implication is that belief in Christ does not include these things. If belief in Christ is noted as the sole condition to be saved (Acts 16:31), and those works are not encompassed in the definition of belief, then works are not necessary to be saved. Moreover, *not only* are they unnecessary, but they corrupt the essence of salvation by grace through faith.

The Bible defines works of the law as fulfilling two overarching laws: loving God and loving your neighbor (Gal 5:14; Matt 7:12, 22:36-40; Luke 10:26-27; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Rom 2:14-23, 3:20, 7:7, 13:8-10; James 1:25, 2:8-11). This encompasses *all* moral commandments found in the Old Testament, such as not committing adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting (Ex 20, Lev 19:18). Works of the law are therefore acts of obedience to God's law, including commandments of both a moral and ceremonial sort. Sin is immoral behavior that breaks God's law (1 John 3:4), which means that turning from sin is attempting to *adhere* to God's law. The way in which many attempt to limit the law in Romans and Galatians is to *restrict* it to ceremonial ordinances (i.e., physical circumcision, dietary restrictions, day observances). There is an abundance of evidence that proves this to be untrue.

1) There is only one law being discussed—hence, *the* (definite article) law. Once an individual acknowledges that Romans and Galatians make *explicit* mention of a moral aspect of the law (e.g., Rom 2:20-25, 7:7, 13:8-10; Gal 5:14), they run into a dilemma. Paul discusses works of *the law*, demonstrating that deeds done in accordance with only *one* type of law are on his mind. He does not flip flop between one law exclusive to a handful of Jewish ceremonial practices, and another broad moral law, both of which he simply describes as “the law”.

2) Beyond these hermeneutical clues, the law is explicitly defined as moral in nature in Romans 2:7-25. Yet upon arriving at Romans 3:20-28, many conditionalists seek to limit the scope of “the deeds of the law” strictly to Jewish ceremonial ordinances. Romans 2 is the beginning of a larger systematic argument that culminates towards the end of chapter 3. It begins by establishing that if one intends to be justified by the works of the law, *all* the law must be kept—it defines those that break the law as those that do evil (v.9), and those that keep it as those that do good (v.7). The conjunction *for* in v.12 signals an expansion on the moral classifications from v.7-11—this directly links the notion of sinning “in the law” with doing evil, which defines the law as moral in nature (good vs. evil).

Paul tells us that the Gentiles (non-Jews), which do not have this law engraved in their cultures, still do by nature the things contained in the law (v.14). Gentiles did not perform animal sacrifices, adhere to Mosaic dietary restrictions, or keep the sabbath. Seeing as the Gentiles are said to *do the law*, this law cannot *exclusively* have those things in mind. What the Gentiles *do* have is God’s moral law written on their heart (v.15)—their conscience bears witness of this law, discerning right from wrong. V.18-25 continues the topic of the law, defining it by non-exhaustively mentioning statutes such as “Thou shalt not steal, commit adultery, or commit idolatry”. The breaking (or transgression) of the law (v.26-27), which we will see brought up again in chapter 3, is directly related to moral commandments of this sort.

3) There are additional clues that this law is still moral in nature in Romans 3. V.12 draws a similar contrast between sin (unrighteousness) and good, noting that “there are none who do good, no not one”. Given that sin is defined as the breaking of the law (1 John 3:4), Paul’s declaration that there are none who do good broadens the scope of the law to include moral behavior. Additionally, v.19 notes that the law renders the *entire world* guilty before God, a world which obviously extends beyond the Jews who were expected to observe ritualistic commandments. The Gentiles stand guilty because they also lie, steal, covet, murder, etc. Through one’s conscience, the law gives knowledge of sin (v.20), not only to Jews, but also to all of mankind. If we hypothetically define the law in Romans 3:19-28 to be confined to Jewish ceremonial ordinances, blatant absurdities arise. Sin is contextually meant to convey the breaking of whatever law is being discussed. V.19 would state that, “whatever things the Jewish ceremonial law says, it says to them who are under this law; that *the world* (which can only be Jews who possess these ceremonial laws) is rendered guilty before God.” “The Jewish ceremonial law gives knowledge of sin” (v.20). “For *all* have broken the Jewish ceremonial laws and come short of the glory of God” (v.23).

Not only do these verses read nonsensically, but a redefinition of the law eliminates the *essence* of key verses such as Romans 3:23, which are commonly cited to teach that *all* are sinners, paralleling Ecclesiastes 7:20. Romans 3:31 concludes the chapter by stating that we *establish this same*

law that we are not justified by (v.28). Thus, despite not being required to observe moral commandments for salvation, the law is still inherently good and should be observed all the more. There is no limitation in Romans chapters 2-13 that confines the law to ritual practices, nor is there a single passage that summarizes the law as ceremonial in nature like *is* the case for the moral law (Rom 13:8-10).

Works vs. Faith: Many conditionalists believe that moral obedience to Christ, turning from sin, and doing good works are part of what it means to “believe in Christ”. Given that works of the law include all of this moral behavior, the following scriptures shut down that idea.

According to Galatians 3:12, “the law is *not* of faith”, meaning you cannot be justified by faith *and* works of the law at the same time. Those that falsely redefine faith to encompass keeping God’s commandments fail to recognize the mutual *exclusivity* of these categories. If salvation is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9), and grace is diametrically opposed to works (Rom 11:6), then *no* amount of works can be incorporated into salvation without corrupting the nature of God’s saving grace. Law-adherence, which includes loving God and other men (John 14:15, 1 John 4:21, Matt 22:36-40), cannot be a necessary condition to be saved. God will not give you his free gift of salvation if you try to work for it; something cannot be by *freely* by grace (Rom 3:24) and by *work* simultaneously.

Romans 11:6: And if by *grace*, then is it no more of works: otherwise *grace is no more grace*. But if it be of *works*, then is it *no more grace*: otherwise work is no more work.

Verses like Romans 4:5 and 10:4 make it impossible to redefine *pisteuō* to include moral commandment keeping.

Romans 4:5 But to him that *worketh not*, but *believeth* on him that justifieth the ungodly, his *faith is counted for righteousness*.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the *end of the law* for righteousness to every one that *believeth*.

Like John 3:16, Romans 4:5 features a present active participle form of *pisteuō* functioning as a substantival participle. It also features the word *faith (pistis)*. According to Paul, it is *possible* for a man to do *no* work and still believe. Thus, saving belief, one that results in imputed righteousness (Rom 4:19-25, 5:9, 5:21), cannot encompass any works. Having to adhere to the law to obtain righteousness is an unattainable standard we all fall short of. Fortunately, if you believe in Christ, he *ends* the need to adhere to the law for righteousness (Rom 3:20-24, 10:4).

The believer’s sins are forgiven, covered, and *will not* be imputed in the future (Rom 4:8). The aorist subjunctive, preceded by *οὐ μή*, signals a strong negation in the future. The phrase *οὐ μή λογίσσεται* is best understood as "it will never be the case that the Lord will impute sin," which is why it reads as future-oriented. How can saving faith be anything other than an initial reception of Christ if God no longer imputes sin to their account?

In Philippians 1:29 Paul tells us “*not only* to believe on him, but *also* to suffer for his sake,” marking a distinction between believing in Christ and suffering with him (a commandment of God). Suffering with Christ is a condition often lumped into what it means to “believe” in Christ, but clearly one *can* believe (and therefore possess eternal life) *without* suffering for Christ. Furthermore, suffering for the name of Christ is a broad category—in the context of Philippians 1, it is related to “striving for the faith of the gospel” (v.14-18, 27). This includes preaching the gospel to others and contending for the faith, which often yields persecution (not always of a physical nature). To be a minister of the gospel is at the *essence* of what it means to suffer with Christ.

If suffering for Christ is *not* part of saving belief, then neither is striving for the faith of the gospel. Incidentally, striving for the faith of the gospel—which includes contending for the truth and saving the lost—is one of *the most* important tenets of the Christian faith (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47, 1 Cor 9:16; Rom 1:14-16). If one of the core pieces that mark a faithful Christian lifestyle is *not* included in what it means to “believe in Christ”, it seems unlikely that keeping the other commandments of God would be either. Preaching the gospel may in fact be *the most* salient commandment, at least of the specific sort. It is least loving of all to allow your neighbor to perish without attempting to persuade them of the truth of the good news. It also isn’t very loving to God to disobey his command to preach the good news of salvation (Mark 16:15). God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Pe 3:9, 1 Tim 2:4); to refrain from striving for the faith of the gospel is to ignore God’s will. If an individual can “believe on him” (Philip 1:29) without obeying God in this sense—without loving God and their neighbor—it becomes unclear why *any* other moral commandments or good works would be encompassed in what it means to believe in Christ (Philip 3:9).²²

In Acts 13:39, belief (*pisteuō*, present active participle) is noted as the only condition to receive justification and forgiveness of sins—apart from the law of Moses. The rulers of the synagogue being preached to from v.15-40 would have understood “the law of Moses” as not only ceremonial, but moral in nature (“after the reading of *the law* and the prophets”). This law includes *all* the moral commandments described from Genesis to Deuteronomy (Ex 20, Lev 19:18). Similarly, in Acts 15:5-11 Peter states that salvation comes by believing the gospel (v.7, 11), contrasting it with adherence to the law of Moses. To mandate both moral and ceremonial law keeping for salvation is to bind unbearable burdens on people (v.10, Matt 23:2-6)—the apostles gave “no such commandment” (v.24).

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are ye saved *through faith*; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: *Not of works*, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Paul contrasts faith (*pistis*)—the means through which we appropriate God’s gift of salvation—against works. If works are defined as good moral behavior of any sort, this verse expressly proves that salvation is *not* by moral reform, turning from sins, or being a good person. Paul’s usage of *works*, when contrasted with *faith*, is always a reference to the works of the law.

²² Chay, *The Faith That Saves*, p.92.

Additionally, Ephesians 2:10 defines these works as “good works”. We should do good works; God both created us for that purpose and desires that we walk in them. However, nothing in the syntax or logic of v.10 mandates that a ‘true’ believer will necessarily do good works, or that a lack of good works results in a loss of salvation—a theory that would blatantly contradict v.8-9.

Titus 3:5-7 reiterates this idea, stating that salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done”, or more simply, “not by good deeds which we have done”. V.8 provides further context defining these works as “good works”, along with the fact that righteousness describes adherence to God’s moral law. Sin is unrighteousness (1 John 5:17, 3:7); therefore righteousness is good moral behavior, which includes loving one another (1 John 3:10-11).

Titus 3:8 affirms that “they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” due to their profitability. This is a less common instance where *pisteuō* is rendered as a perfect participle (e.g., John 20:29, Acts 18:27), contextually denoting an action that was completed in the past with effects in the present.²³ The action of belief must have occurred before the present action of the main verb *phrontizō* (to be careful). However, this does not mean that the present effects of *pisteuō* are that the belief is ongoing. Rather, it is adjectival, modifying these individuals as “those who have believed”, intensively conveying their present state resulting from past action. Since they *had believed*, they could always be referred to as “the ones who have believed in God”. Likewise, Lazarus, who was raised back to life, could presently be classified as “a man who has died”. Although he was no longer in a state of death, the event of him *having died* extends into the present—he is still “one who has died” (John 11:44).

Why didn’t Paul state, “They who *continue to believe* in God should be careful to do good works”? Why frame their *having believed* as the basis for why they should do good works, instead of framing belief in God as continuous action? Since this action is referred to as having been done, this proves that *pisteuō*, within the context of faith in Christ, does not *necessarily* mean faithfulness.

Given the fact that Paul wants this saying *constantly* and *strongly* affirmed, the implication is that it is possible to believe and *not* do the good works. Otherwise, Paul would not need to direct them to *constantly* remind others to do good works. If it is possible to truly believe without doing good works, then good works cannot be encompassed in the definition of *what it means* to believe (*pisteuō*) in Christ. This same theme of a profitable faith, one accompanied by good works, carries over into James 2—one of the most robust chapters proving that *pistis* does not intrinsically mean faithfulness.

James 2:17 Even so *faith*, if it hath *not works*, is *dead, being alone*.

Works of the law in James 2: James 2:8-12 set the stage of the chapter by defining “the law” in the same way that we have previously observed. Although it is called “the royal law” and “the law of liberty”, James is not discussing a law distinct from that of Moses. He cites the *same* moral commandments from the law of Moses (Ex 20, Lev 19:18) and even refers to these commandments as “according to the scripture.” The same judgement these believers cannot be saved from without

²³ Abraham Kuruvilla, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021), 203, 264.

works (v.14) is the same kind they will be held liable to for not adhering to the law (v.12-13). If this judgement is an eternal judgement (i.e., the lake of fire), then you must adhere to the law of Moses to be saved from the lake of fire—a claim frequently refuted by the apostles (Acts 15:5-11, 24). In the Bible, judgement is not always of an eternal sort. The Lord rebukes and chastises his children—those he loves (Heb 12:5-7, 1 Cor 11:32)—and judges *his people* on earth for their sin (Heb 10:30, Deut 32). James remarks that a faith without works—without adhering to the law described in v.8-12—is unprofitable. He provides an example of works in v.15-17 that align with “loving thy neighbor as thyself” in v.8 (clothing the naked and feeding the hungry). However, Titus 3:8 makes it clear that it *is* possible to believe without good works.

Dead faith: The concept of a “dead faith” in James 2 establishes that *pistis* cannot intrinsically mean faithfulness, and furthermore that a true faith can exist *without* any good works. Given that faith is the only condition to possess eternal life, if a dead faith is *still* an authentic faith, then it must be *sufficient* to grant eternal life. Although a dead faith cannot save you from chastisement or judgement on earth, it can save you from hell.

James explicitly qualifies the audience of his letter as those who *already* have faith (1:3, 2:1, 2:5). He wouldn’t warn believers about judgement for a dead faith (v.12-17) unless they *could possess* a dead faith. Throughout this chapter, James tells those whom he explicitly states “have faith” not to have a “dead faith”—implying that, whatever dead faith is, it cannot nullify the fact that these brethren truly believed. If James were writing to individuals he assumed could be unsaved, he would have addressed that group in his letter. However, the audience of the letter never shifts from the beloved brethren who have faith.²⁴ The only options to escape this conclusion are 1) to suggest that James also intends for this letter to apply to potential unbelievers in the Church, although that audience is never specified. The contents of a letter only apply to whom it is addressed, even if others read it. Or 2) to state that these people may not actually have faith, although James tells us they do. Along with being irrational, evidence would be required for these assertions..

Faith is “dead” in regards to its profitability (“what doth it profit”), *not* its ability to grant eternal life. A dead faith cannot feed a brother who is hungry, nor does it bear fruit (Luke 8:12-14). When *nekros* (dead) is used metaphorically, it means that something is inactive or not functioning how it ought to be, not that it is inauthentic. V.17 notes that, “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, *being alone*.” Therefore, faith can truly *be alone*, although it is “dead” with respect to its intended function (to profit others). The logic of v.17 requires that this be true faith (*pistis*); otherwise, *what* without works is dead?

Paul tells us that “without the law sin was dead,” but also that “until the law sin was in the world...” (Rom 5:13, 7:8). Sin still existed before the law, despite it being inactive in some respect. If a person states, “my phone is dead”, that does not mean their phone is not real, but that it ran out of battery and therefore isn’t operational. In v.26, James states, “For *as* the body without the spirit is dead, *so* faith without works is dead also.” Let’s substitute the proposed meaning of “dead faith” that many reformed individuals hold to: “For as the body without the spirit is *not a real body*, so faith

²⁴ Chay, *The Faith That Saves*, p.130.

without works is *not real faith*.” A body that is dead is *still* a real body; therefore, a faith that is dead must *still* be real faith.

In v.20-22, a “perfect faith” is described as the opposite of a “dead faith”. Paul prays that the Thessalonians might perfect that which is lacking in their faith (1 Thess 3:10), implying that truly extant faith can stand independently of the works that should perfect it (Luke 8:14). 2 Peter 1:5 commands believers to *add* moral attributes to their faith (*pistis*), indicating that faith itself does not inherently include these qualities. Traits like temperance and meekness, also listed as fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, further show that faith does not intrinsically involve these virtues.

Proving the authenticity of a dead faith refutes the common reformed misunderstanding of James 2, while also establishing that *pistis* cannot inherently mean faithfulness. If *pistis* always meant faithfulness, how does James use it in a way that clearly does not describe faithfulness? This argument stands *even without* establishing that a “dead faith” is still real faith. However, once established that “dead faith” is indeed real faith, two things occur—1) the Calvinist definition of saving faith is disproven, and 2) it becomes impossible for conditionalists to define faith to encompass moral behavior or obedience to God’s commandments (including loving others and God).

If *pistis* (Eph 2:8) denotes faithfulness, and one proposes that James 2:14 refers to a positional salvation instead of a general salvation, then faithfulness cannot grant eternal life. Since *pistis* does not inherently denote faithfulness, a conditionalist would require other forms of evidence to prove that the faith which grants salvation (Eph 2:8, Rom 3:30) *is* faithfulness. In conclusion, even a faith *without* works can grant eternal life—faith is the only condition to obtain eternal life and a “dead faith” remains authentic faith (John 3:16, Eph 2:8).

Some try to detract from this argument by claiming that faith is also a work. In one sense, initial belief could be seen as a work, but it is categorically distinct for a few reasons. (1) Even if it is a work, verses like Eph 2:8-9, Romans 4:5, and Galatians 2:16 note that we are not justified by *works* (plural). Thus, even granting that faith can be classified as *one* work in a weak sense, these verses carry the same implications. (2) Belief is the only thing explicitly contrasted *against* works in the Bible, logically delineating the two (e.g., Rom 4:5). (3) Initial saving faith is the only non-meritorious thing a person can do, akin to accepting a birthday gift. Once other conditions begin to be imposed on the retention of that gift beyond the mere initial reception, especially difficult conditions (e.g., suffering with Christ), it no longer can be classified as a gift (Eph 2:8-9). (4) Initial belief is the easiest conscious deed a person can perform. Works of the law can vary in difficulty, but none are *quite* as easy as that.

2.1b | The direct context of John 3-4 and additional analogies to belief

(1) Salvation is conditioned on belief alone, as indicated in Acts 16:30-31 and John 3:16. (2) The Bible defines saving belief as a one-time act of trusting in Christ, as the direct context of John 3-4 makes clear. (3) Therefore, once you meet this requirement, your salvation cannot be lost, since it depends solely on the one-time act you have already fulfilled.

In John 3:14-15, Jesus compares Himself to the bronze serpent in the wilderness, which the Israelites only needed to look at *once* to be healed (Num 21:9). Similarly, believers only need to believe in Jesus *once* to receive eternal life: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so* must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

In John 4:12-15, Jesus teaches that just *one drink* of his "living water"—a metaphor for belief as seen in John 6:35 ("he that believeth on me shall never thirst")—is enough to grant eternal life and permanently satisfy spiritual thirst. This contrasts with literal water, which must be consumed *repeatedly* to quench thirst. Some conditionalists argue that eternal life requires ongoing belief, similar to how one must continually drink water to stay alive, but this misses the point of Jesus' analogy and eliminates the contrast between v.13-14.

In John 4:13 Jesus says "whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again" (referring to literal water). The verb *pinō* (drinketh) is also a present active participle (like John 3:16), but the action conveyed by the verb itself is not continuous. The latter part of the verse indicates that if you do this action (drink), you will have to do it again ("shall thirst again"), implying that "drinketh" in v.13 is not continual drinking. It cannot be rendered, "whoever continues to drink water will thirst again." A person can certainly drink without thirsting, but perpetually drinking water *does indeed* prevent thirst. The grammar is more concerned about the nature of the action (the one that drinks) and the fact that he will have to keep drinking, rather than the duration or repetition of drinking. Even someone who drinks *once* is classified as "the one that drinks" and this person will be required to drink again.

If you drink literal water at this moment, you will eventually thirst and have to drink it again—but if you drink Jesus' living water (in this one moment), you will never have to drink again. This not only provides another instance of the present tense (and participle) not indicating continual action, but it is perhaps the clearest and most contextual example to prove this. These verses directly follow the belief passages in John 3 (3:16-18, 3:36), and drinking is *explicitly* analogous to belief (6:35). Thus, one drink (one moment of belief) is sufficient to grant everlasting life, and you do not need to keep drinking (or keep believing continually).

The Samaritan woman in John 4:15 did not yet grasp that the water Jesus offered was spiritual, but she understood that it would *permanently* quench her thirst, meaning she would no longer need to drink again: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw". Spiritual thirst represents a need for eternal life (John 6:35, 50), and failing to satisfy this thirst results in spiritual death. Did the woman misunderstand when she realized that drinking Jesus' living water *once* meant she would not have to return to drink again? Imagine being presented with two options—Drink A, which temporarily quenches thirst but requires repeated consumption, and Drink B, described as a special concoction that permanently satisfies thirst—would you need to keep drinking Drink B to remain satiated?

John 3:18 is another essential piece of context that defines whether "believes" in John 3:16-18 is continual belief or a one time action. If someone hypothetically believed in Christ then stopped believing, could we say of that person that they "have not believed"? If not, how could they fall under the condemned group in John 3:18b given that they do not fit that description?

John 3:18: He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he *hath not believed* in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There is no qualifier in the context restricting “hath not believed” to a certain amount of time in the past (e.g., one week). Thus, the *only* person that can be condemned to hell is one who has *never believed* in Christ. One may try to claim that “hath not believed” means “hath *no longer* believed.” However, this would import a temporal qualifier into the word $\mu\eta$, which alone does not convey cessation of action, especially without evidence. Further, the logic of that new sentence—“He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he *no longer believes* in the name of the only begotten Son of God”—would be to assume that the person who “believeth not” had already believed. What about the person who has *never* believed? Is he counted as the condemned one that “believeth not”? As such, anyone who *has put their faith in Christ* at one point cannot be condemned, as they do not fit this classification of the one that “believeth not”. If a believer who stopped believing can remain uncondemned, since he “hath believed”, then the saving belief described in v.16-18 cannot mean faithfulness or continual belief as this individual did not meet that standard.

Witzki articulates a fallacious, although common, argument based on the grammatical symmetry of John 3:18; claiming that if one moment of faith leads to possessing “eternal life forever,” even if one departs from the faith, then one must also argue that a single moment of disbelief makes a person condemned to hell forever, even if they believe later.²⁵ On a side note, note the tautological irony in stating “eternal life forever”.

Just because it is possible to translate from the category of death (condemnation) to life through belief, does not automatically *necessitate* that you can do the reverse—or that unbelief and belief function in the same way. Context, not the grammar *alone*, must confirm which is true. Free Grace does not claim that *pisteuō* means a one time belief *because* it is in the present participle form. However, many conditionalists often *do* make that kind of argument about continued belief as we have observed. Free Grace merely proposes that this one time classification is a *possible* function of the present participle, after which the contextual evidence does all the legwork to determine the way in which “believeth” and “believeth not” operate. Witzki’s argument falsely assumes symmetry between belief and unbelief based solely on their identical grammar, which myopically ignores the contextual differences in how salvation and condemnation function (e.g., John 3:18b). It could plausibly be the case (and is) that the one classified as “the unbeliever” remains so *until* they believe, after which they are permanently categorized as “the believer”. Unbelief is the default position of all men; all are classified as “those who do not believe,” until they believe.

Recall the example of Lazarus from earlier. Imagine that the following proposition were true: “Whoever dies (present tense) has his name forever engraved in history, but whoever does not die does not have his name forever engraved in history”. To be alive is the default status of every person; thus, before Lazarus died he was not famous. After he died, he is now classified as “one who has died” and is famous from thence forth. He fulfilled the one time action of dying. Even though

²⁵ Witzki, *Saving Faith: Act of a Moment or Attitude of a Life?*, p.24-25.

Lazarus resurrected from the dead, that does not mean that he is now categorized as “the one that did not die”. Even if Lazarus never died again, he is still classified as “one who has died,” and is therefore forever famous.

Context would determine if the nature of the fame were neverending, or the death a one-time event, but the syntax and logic in this analogy can certainly be structured in a way to convey this idea. In fact, that seems to be the more standard reading of the sentence. Not only is the one-time nature of the action and classification semantically acceptable, but this analogy also displays that equivocating meaning across the categories in the sentence is fallacious.

Take for instance these two analogies: “Whoever applies for citizenship in this country becomes a citizen forever, but whoever does not apply remains a non-citizen,” or “Whoever enters into marriage is considered married forever, but whoever does not marry remains single.” Although these actions are typically understood as one-time events and their results are qualified as eternal (forever), both of these propositions still demonstrate the idea of a one-time action resulting in a classification that cannot be undone. Even if you did not persist in applying for citizenship, you can no longer become a non-citizen. Although belief does not necessarily carry the tone of a one-time action, it is still semantically possible for it to be used in this way.

To provide another example, imagine that, “whoever drinks the tap water in this town lives forever, but whoever does not drink the water in this town does not live forever.” First, let’s assume that *drinks* is a one-time action in this analogy, paralleling biblical belief and falling within the semantic range of the present tense. The person that drinks the tap water even once must live forever. Even if they stop drinking, the context still classifies them as “the one that drinks” because they have drunk. The person that does not drink does not live forever; that is, until he drinks once, then he can no longer be classified as one who “does not drink” or “didn’t drink”.

Although the grammar is identical in that both actions are present tense, that does not automatically mean that ceasing to drink (even once) would result in never being able to live forever again, even if you later drank. The nature of the action and thing it results in would determine if that were true. If the life lasts *forever*, then it is impossible to stop having life, even if you stop drinking. Even if one attempts to navigate around the idea of “living forever” in this analogy, like many do with “eternal life,” that still doesn’t avoid the conclusion. Witzki’s argument is fallacious because it doesn’t *necessarily* follow that disbelieving once would permanently yield condemnation in the same way that believing once permanently yields salvation. It is logically possible for the one-time nature of belief to result in eternal salvation, despite the same being untrue of disbelief. Furthermore, this is supported with the evidence in John 3 alone, making Witzki’s grammatical argument in John 3:18 and 36 carry no evidentiary weight.

Despite the fact that one can believe and then stop believing, that does not imply that they can translate from the category of “the believer” to “the unbeliever” in the sense that John 3:18 describes it. It could, but it would be fallacious to draw that implication from the symmetry in grammar alone. Context is king. In fact, John 3:18b qualifies what it means to be classified as “he that believeth not”—it is *because* he has *never* believed. When Greenlee retranslates John 3:18 to convey the meaning of continued belief, he oddly leaves out the last clause in the verse, the part

which makes it impossible to define *pisteuō* as continued belief.²⁶ The only “unbeliever” and the only one “condemned already” is the one who “*hath not believed.*” No comment is made about this point in both of Witzki’s articles.

In John 6:33-36, eating bread and drinking water (some of the most simple human actions) are analogized to belief. These analogies are intentional, meant to demonstrate the ease of obtaining salvation, along with the fact that it cannot be lost (never hunger, never thirst). Lenski cites the present active participle in v.54-56 to note that only the one who *continues* to eat and drink possesses eternal life.²⁷ This does not harmonize with the instance of the woman at the well in John 4.

Imagine that you took a bite out of a loaf of bread that was guaranteed to permanently eliminate hunger, you wouldn’t have to keep eating the bread to remain satisfied. Likewise, you believe once and will never thirst for everlasting life again. To propose that you must keep eating Jesus’ living bread would render the phrase “shall never hunger” a moot point, effectively making Jesus’ bread of life like any other literal piece of bread. Imagine that I said, “whoever keeps eating garlic bread for the rest of their life will never hunger.” That goes without saying—to not hunger, eating food is a given.

In John 6:49-58, the aorist tense of “eats” (analogous to belief) is used interchangeably with the present tense, countering some of the grammatical claims cited in part 1 of this article. V.51 better suits a one time act of eating: “if any man eats (aorist) of this bread, he shall live forever.” For instance, if someone said, “if anyone eats my lunch, they will face my wrath.” That likely does not mean that the person must perpetually eat my lunch to face my wrath. A contrast is made between the physical manna (v.58) that the Israelites had to keep eating and the bread of life that Jesus offers. Manna could not give life, but Jesus’ bread permanently satisfies hunger. Imagine for a moment that God gave the Israelites manna that would allow them to “never hunger”; they would not have had to keep eating manna. If Jesus’ bread requires continual eating (believing) to possess eternal life, it would be no different from the manna.

Additional analogies to salvation: The New Testament features numerous other analogies to salvation that demonstrate its nature as something that occurs once, is unrepeatable, and easy: accepting a free gift (Rom 5:16-18, Eph 2:8-9), entering through a door (John 10:9-10), spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11), spiritual baptism (Rom 6:4-5, Col 2:12), dying with Christ (Rom 6:5-13), a birth (John 1:12-13, 1 John 5:1), and a seed taking root (Matt 13:4-8, Luke 8:11-14). Accepting a free gift is perhaps one of the easiest things a person can do, nor is it a continual process; we accept God’s gift through faith, implying that the saving faith must be easy and singular. Entering a door is another one of the easiest things a person can do. Both a spiritual circumcision and baptism, like their literal counterparts, cannot be undone and occur at one point in time. Christ only died once—likewise, you can only die with him once. Our spiritual birth, like a literal birth (or the planting of a seed), occurs at one point in time; a birth also conveys something immutable that cannot be undone. You are permanently part of God’s family in the same way that your identity is

²⁶ S. Witzki, *Saving Faith is the Attitude of a Life: Scholarly Evidence*, p.5

²⁷ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 493.

fixed as someone who is the biological child of his or her parents. What does the analogy of a birth seek to convey but those truths?

Being born again: For saving faith to be defined as faithfulness, a birth would have to be reversible and repeatable. John 3:3-7 tells us that to enter the kingdom of God, we must be born again. The direct context in v.14-16, along with John 1:12-13 and 1 John 5:1 (“whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”) convey that being born again occurs by believing in Christ.

If an individual can stop believing, then the conditionalist must concede that this individual is *no longer* born of God (1 John 5:1), since being born of God would be contingent on “continuing to believe”. The grammatical form and function of *pisteuō* in 1 John 5:1 is *identical* to that of John 3:16 (present active participle functioning as a substantival participle). Thus, to be consistent, a conditionalist must claim that “believes” in this verse also refers to ongoing belief or faithfulness: “whoever continues believing (or is faithful) is born of God”. However, multiple problems arise with such an interpretation—a birth occurs at *one* point in time, meaning it cannot be contingent on ongoing belief. Additionally, if a person stopped believing, this interpretation would suggest that their birth can be undone.

The more grammatically and logically sound reading is to recognize “whoever believes” as a classification of “the believer” or “the one that has believed”. Even if someone stops believing, they are still born of God because they are classified as “the one that believes”. A conditionalist or Reformed individual may retort that, “the verse merely states that anyone who is currently believing is born of God, but not that the person who stopped believing is no longer born of God.” This runs into two issues. 1) That is not the plain reading of the verse and would require understanding John 3:16 the same way such that: “John 3:16 merely states that anyone who is currently believing has eternal life, but not that the person who stopped believing no longer has eternal life.” A conditionalist could not concede that point without abandoning their soteriology. The only consistent way to understand 1 John 5:1 under this “faithfulness paradigm” is to claim one can cease being born of God if they stop believing.

2) If the conditionalist concedes that being born of God is immutable, they have conceded to eternal security and the one-time nature of saving faith. Someone born of God cannot go to hell because they possess God’s spiritual seed. Laying aside the technical nature of the grammar—if the birth was contingent on believing, and a birth only occurs in one moment (John 1:12-13), then the belief that makes one a son of God is a one-time belief. If your birth, which is immutable, marks you as a son, and being a son automatically makes one an heir of God (Gal 4:7), then anyone who has ever believed is an heir of God. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to state that this spiritual birth can be undone or reversed. This is highly improbable given the lack of explicit evidence discussing a reversal of spiritual regeneration, along with the essence of the analogy itself.

Discipleship vs. salvation: Jesus analogizes the hefty cost of discipleship to contemplating the cost of building, which would include labor and material costs (Luke 14:26-28). That does not describe the free gift of everlasting life (Rom 6:23). Thus, you do not need to be a disciple to be saved, although you should be one. Discipleship goes hand-in-hand with faithfulness, demonstrating that

faithfulness and obedience to God's commandments cannot be conditions for salvation. If the *free* gift of salvation is received through faith (Eph 2:8-9), and the *costly* conditions for discipleship (obedience and faithfulness) cannot be the conditions for salvation, then faith cannot mean faithfulness and obedience.

Healing the sick: A common theme in the gospels is Jesus *instantaneously* healing people—the blind, the sick, and even the dead—by faith (Luke 8:47-48, 18:41-43; Mark 5:34, 10:51-52, 5:36-42). Faith is the only condition mentioned for receiving this healing, and Jesus even explicitly states, "*believe only*," (Luke 8:50; Mark 5:36). If the healing was instantaneous, then the kind of faith required to be saved or made whole must also be instantaneous. Luke 5:31-32 (along with other passages) confirms that physical healing in the Gospels is a symbolic picture of Christ's healing of sinners by faith. Those who were physically afflicted did not need to turn from their sins or maintain ongoing belief to be healed; they were "healed immediately". They would not revert to blindness, sickness, or death if they later sinned grievously or abandoned the faith.

2.1c | The propositional nature of saving belief

John 20:31 and 1 John 5:1 state that eternal life is granted by believing "*that* Jesus is the Christ". This belief is propositional—assenting to the truth *that* He is the Savior who died for our sins and rose again (Rom 10:9-10, 1 Cor 15:3-4). Believing the truth of a trustworthy proposition (that this person can save you) entails trust, which is why terms like *believe*, *trust* (Eph 1:13), and *receive* (John 1:12) are sometimes used in relation to salvation. However, believing this fact does not *necessarily* result in obedience to His commands. Just as one could believe "*that* King James was the king in the 17th century" without obeying him, believing a proposition and obedience are distinct, especially when the commands are difficult or require personal sacrifice.

Abraham's belief in God is noted as full persuasion (Rom 4:18-21) *that* God could perform what he promised ("so shall thy seed be"), which defines belief as a propositional trust. The righteousness that was imputed to Abraham can also be imputed to us *if we believe* in God who raised the Lord Jesus Christ, the one that paid for our sins and rose from the dead (v.24-25). Like Abraham, our saving belief is a full persuasion *that* Jesus Christ performed these redemptive works for us.

In John 3:36, belief leads to eternal life, and in the following chapter (4:39-42), people are shown believing at a specific point in time ("many more believed...*now* we believe"). This belief centers on accepting Christ as Savior by believing a proposition ("*that* this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world"), not on perpetual obedience to His commands. John 11:25-27 reinforces this, where the saving belief is the acknowledgment "*that* Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". Other instances of saving belief convey the same theme (John 9:35-38, Matt 8:28-29, Acts 8:36-37). The gospel is a set of propositional facts, "*that* Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead" (1 Cor 15:3-4; Rom 10:9-10, 16-17). To believe the gospel, which is synonymous with believing in Christ, is to believe a set of facts about Christ (his person and work).

In Acts 26, Paul had just finished telling king Agrippa the gospel (v.22-23), citing how the prophets said *that* Christ would die and rise from the dead and show a light (analogous to salvation) to the people. In v.27-28, he asks Agrippa, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest,” to which Agrippa responds, “Almost thou *persuadest* me to be a Christian.” Paul asked Agrippa if he believes the claims that the prophets made about Christ, which is propositional in nature (that...). Agrippa’s response also demonstrates that saving faith is persuasion of these facts. Furthermore, despite *pisteuō* being in the present tense in v.27, Paul was not asking king Agrippa, “Do you *continue* to believe the prophets? I know that you *continue* to believe.” He was not asking whether Agrippa is faithful to the prophets’ claims that Christ must die and rise again. This again proves that the present tense of *pisteuō* does not necessarily convey ongoing action—in this particular instance, the context provides evidence that saving faith is an initial persuasion of the gospel truth.

One can believe these truths without aligning their lifestyle with that belief. While belief and obedience may align, they do not *necessarily* follow one another. For instance, trusting a king doesn’t *guarantee* one will obey every difficult command, such as going to battle or offering oneself as a hostage. Similarly, believing in Christ doesn’t guarantee that a person will overcome all (or any) sinful behaviors, or remain faithful throughout life in the face of tribulation and persecution. A person may believe that Jesus is the Savior, the Christ anointed to bring salvation (John 1:29, 4:42; Matt 1:21; Acts 5:31), yet later convert to a false religion or persist in sinful habits. Saving belief, as described in John 11:25-27 and 20:31, fulfills the requirement for eternal life but does not necessitate lifelong obedience and suffering (Philip 1:29). If propositional faith (persuasion) is required for eternal life, and believing propositions does not automatically entail allegiance or ongoing action, then faithfulness cannot be part of the definition of saving faith.

Proponents of Lordship salvation—including none other than John MacArthur— often claim that to believe in the *Lord* Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), you must submit your allegiance and will to his Lordship through following his commandments, repenting of sins, and taking the costly path of discipleship.²⁸ One is required to yield their life to Jesus as Lord of their life, making propositional faith in the gospel of Christ insufficient to grant eternal life. Although we *should* do these things (not for salvation), it is entirely possible to believe in the lordship of Christ—something *already* completed by believing that he is the Son of God who died for sins and rose again—while not following his commandments. This is evidenced by the fact that *nobody* follows God’s commandments perfectly (Matt 19:17-22). Therefore, it is possible to believe in Christ while disobeying him to some extent, implying that there is no *necessary association* between believing that proposition and aligning your future behavior with it. To “believe on the *Lord* Jesus Christ” means the same thing as believing on *Christ* (John 3:36). Bob Wilkin summarizes Lordship salvation as *commitment, obedience, and perseverance* until the end—expressed in either a Reformed or Arminian soteriology (i.e., conditionalism vs. back-loaded eternal security).²⁹

²⁸ John MacArthur, "An Introduction to Lordship Salvation," *Grace to You*, 2016, <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A114/an-introduction-to-lordship-salvation>.

²⁹ Bob Wilkin, "Lordship Salvation for Dummies," *Grace in Focus*, 2006, <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/lordship-salvation-for-dummies/>.

A common phenomenon observed among addicts is that they generally believe certain sinful behaviors are evil or harmful. Yet, they still engage in those very behaviors due to their enticing nature. A paper published by Van Denend et al. titled “Moral Injury in the Context of Substance Use Disorders: a Narrative Review” analyzed this apparent paradox:

It is suggested that the activation of the primitive dopaminergic reward system causes a potential conflict between the experienced need for the addictive substance and a person’s moral code or values...The crucial factor is the collision between the two sets of demands; following the former violates the latter. The injury occurs in this clash, in what Brock and Lettini call a “deep sense of transgression”... For example, one provider working in the Impact of Killing program hypothesizes directly on the SUD experience as analogous: “When patients are using substances they also do things that they feel bad about...lie, cheat and steal and don’t pay child support or get into domestic violence or just being a bad father or whatever it is and sometimes all roads lead to Rome as far as guilt and shame”...During the development of a substance use disorder, the exact system designed to ensure that we break moral character to ensure survival is now ensuring that we break moral character to compulsively seek the substance we are addicted to.³⁰

Sin is our substance. Jesus' commandments are good but impossible to follow perfectly, as we all sin *daily*, whether it be lying, coveting, or lusting. The lusts of the flesh make it so that one still does the things he does not want to do; Paul, speaking in the present tense, cites himself as a prime example of this (Rom 7:14-25, 1 Tim 1:15). Since abstaining from sin is not encompassed in what it means to believe in Christ, some attempt to shift the goalpost, either towards an *effort* to turn from sin or a feeling of remorse *when* they sin. If a person is not doing these things, he either won't *get* saved or it proves that he was *never* 'truly' saved in the first place. However, this approach undermines the high standard of God's law *and* diminishes His grace, as it is *still* a system conditioned on law adherence. God's commandments do not say, “*Thou shalt not covet—unless thou feelest bad about coveting,*” or, “*Try your best to love thy neighbor,*” or, “*Go and sin no more, but if thou dost sin, it is acceptable as long as thou feelest remorse.*” Transgressing the law brings legal condemnation all the same, especially when committed against an all-just God. If the law must be kept *at all*, *all* the law must be kept (Gal 3:10). It takes only one transgression to be classified as a law breaker in God's eyes (Rom 2:12, 6:23; Jam 2:10).

This helps counter the claim that ongoing obedience to Christ, turning from sins, or lifestyle reform are necessary to possess eternal life. While demonstrating the propositional nature of saving faith counters the idea that faith in Christ means submitting to his Lordship in one's life; on its own, this point cannot counter the claim that you must continue to believe this proposition to be saved. To do that, referencing some of the other grammatical and contextual arguments in this article would be necessary.

³⁰ J. Van Denend, J. I. Harris, B. Fuehrlein, and E. L. Edens, "Moral Injury in the Context of Substance Use Disorders: A Narrative Review," *PubMed Central*, 2022, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9483387/>.

2.1d | Instances of saving belief

Like previously shown in John 4:39-42, the book of John contains numerous other instances of people fulfilling the action of belief (*pisteuō*) that John 3:36 notes is required to possess eternal life (2:23, 7:48, 8:28-30, 9:36-38, 10:42, 11:26-27, 11:45-48, 12:11, 12:42, 16:30-31). Arguing that these instances represent *only* initial faith or a conditional state of salvation creates an inconsistency in how *pisteuō* is used within the same context. In John 3:36, *pisteuō* is understood by conditionalists as faithfulness, continual belief, or ongoing obedience—*this* action results in the possession of everlasting life. However, in John 4:39-42, *pisteuō* (rendered in both the aorist and present tense) is evidently an initial conversionary belief, not faithfulness. John 11:45-48 displays this theme well: “many of the Jews...believed on him...If we let him thus alone, all *men* will believe on him.” The Jews completed the action of belief in response to the miracles that Jesus had performed—the same action that 11:25-27 notes results in everlasting life. If Christ were allowed to continue unrepressed, all men would perform this same conversionary action of saving belief.

Jesus states the following in John 8:24: “for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Then in v.30, “many believed on him”. The same type of saving belief that washes away your sins is contextually the same belief the Jews completed in v.30. In John 9:35, Jesus asked a man whom he had previously healed from his blindness, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”, to which he responded, “Lord, I believe.”

John 9:39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

John 9:40 And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

John 9:41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

The man that had just believed in Christ had been forgiven of all his sins, while the Pharisees did not believe and therefore their sin remains. The type of belief that takes away one’s sin is the type that the previously blind man had expressed in v.35-38. Jesus’ physical healing of the previously blind man (v.5-15) is analogous to the remission of sins he offered him through faith. The Pharisees, who were generally self-righteous and did not consider themselves “blind” (in need of healing), did not seek Christ’s forgiveness through faith apart from their own works (Rom 10:3-4).

In Acts 13:26-39, Paul preaches the gospel to a synagogue of Jews, centered around the death and resurrection of Christ and his offer of salvation through faith. He concludes his address with an invitation to believe in Christ:

Acts 13:38-39:...through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that *believe* are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Pisteuō in v.39 is a present active participle that functions substantivally, like in John 3:16 (“all believers are justified from all things”). When Paul returned to preach these same words the next sabbath day (v.42-44), the Gentiles in v.48 “glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Thus, in the direct context, we see the action of belief being fulfilled, providing strong evidence that saving belief is a one time event where trust is placed in a set of truths about Christ (v.26-39).

In Acts 10:36-43, Peter preaches the same gospel message to Cornelius and his household, concluding in v.43 with, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” When Peter retells this account of his ministry in Acts 11:14-18, he makes it clear that believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is something that occurs in one moment. Cornelius and his household were saved by believing words (11:14), words that resulted in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 11:15-17: And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them... God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ...

If the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and his household at one moment in Acts 10:44 (“while Peter yet spake these words”), then the belief (*pisteuō*) that resulted in this indwelling (and remission of sins) was also momentary. This instantaneous belief is also a present active participle with the same substantival function as in John 3:16. Did Cornelius contextually complete a *different* kind of belief in v.44 from that described in v.43? This belief is called “repentance unto life” in v.18, further displaying that one moment of belief grants eternal life.

In Acts 8:32-35, Phillip likewise preaches the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, after which the eunuch asks, “what doth hinder me to be baptized?”. Phillip responds, “if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest,” to which the eunuch answered, “I believe *that* Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” If *pisteuō* (present tense) meant ongoing belief or faithfulness, this verse would read something to the effect of:

“If you *continue believing* with all your heart, you may get water baptized. The Eunuch answered and said, *I continue to believe that* Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

Or,

“If you are *continuously faithful* with all your heart, you may get water baptized. The Eunuch answered and said, *I am faithful that* Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

There are two glaring concerns with this interpretation. 1) Water baptism is a one-time and instantaneous event. Belief, the prerequisite for a one-time event that occurred moments later, cannot be ongoing faithfulness or continued belief. 2) The Eunuch’s response was that he believes a proposition (“*that* Jesus Christ is the Son of God”), which would make little sense if belief meant faithfulness. The Eunuch had just been converted, he certainly had not “continued to believe” that

proposition in any capacity. Moreover, if faithfulness also encompasses obedience to God's commandments, as it rightly does, the Eunuch certainly did not perform anything of that sort before getting water baptized. Therefore, the prerequisite to get water baptized, which is *pisteuō*, cannot be defined as faithfulness. The present-tense argument from earlier crumbles in this passage. Acts 8:32-38 provide a salvific and conversionary context identical to ones we have observed throughout John and Acts. Phillip preached the same gospel message with the same directive to believe as in Acts 10:36-43 and 13:26-39.

Without additional context to suggest otherwise, and without importing soteriological bias into the text, that is the plain usage of the word "believe" being used throughout John and Acts. Both are evangelistic books at their core. The book of John repeatedly records instances of people believing in Christ and is written with the purpose of getting others to believe (John 20:31). Similarly, the book of Acts shows the evangelism of the apostles.

These instances are intentionally provided to display the nature of saving faith—not as faithfulness, but as an initial reception of Christ. While a separation in the usage of *pisteuō* within a passage's direct context is not impossible—along with refuting the prior evidence, it would need to be substantiated with its own evidence. To even begin establishing a *distinction*, one would *first* have to prove that these passages (e.g., John 3:16, 36; Acts 13, etc.) define *pisteuō* as faithfulness using hermeneutical evidence from the surrounding context. An example of a weak argument to prove this would be, "the saving belief in Acts 10:43 cannot be a one-time event because other passages (e.g., John 15:1-6, Heb 3:12, 2 Tim 2:12) prove that a person can lose his salvation." This is not a weighty hermeneutical argument to define belief for two reasons. 1) It doesn't break down the text at hand in any way. 2) It imposes one's soteriology from contextually distant passages into the text. While making sure one's interpretation aligns with other passages is important, that alone won't provide strong exegetical evidence to define belief in Acts 10:43.

The contextual and literary evidence strongly support the idea that John and Acts provide instances of saving belief being accomplished. While words can be used differently in different contexts, the evidence (continuity and contextual proximity) throughout John and Acts assure us that this is not an illegitimate totality transfer of the word *pisteuō*. *Pisteuō* in John 4 is intended to be understood the same way as in John 3:36.

Summary of part 2

- Both *pistis* and *pisteuō* cannot mean ongoing belief or faithfulness.
- Belief is contrasted against the deeds encompassed in the definition of faithfulness.
- The bible provides us with instances of momentary saving belief being accomplished in the direct context of core salvation verses.
- Saving belief is propositional in nature, which makes it impossible to define in a way that includes ongoing obedience to God's commandments.
- The direct context of John 3-6, as well as other analogies to saving belief, make it impossible to define as ongoing in nature.

3.1 | The unending nature of eternal life

The nature of eternal life is that it has no end (unending life), which is why Jesus can issue synonymous statements like “whoever...believes in me will never die” (John 11:26). If eternal life can be presently possessed upon initial belief, which it indeed can be (1 John 5:11-13, John 5:24, 6:47), then one cannot cease possessing it, or else it was never properly classified as *eternal* life to begin with. In other words, let’s say that an individual possessed eternal life on his 18th birthday, and it follows that “he will never perish” according to John 10:28—if he did perish in the future, 1) Jesus would have lied, or 2) he never actually had “eternal” life to begin with. Both statements cannot be true since Jesus cannot lie and it is already presupposed (and true) that this person “hath everlasting life” based on John 10:28, 1 John 5:13, and John 6:47. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to state that no believer can *presently* possess eternal life until they physically die, but this is patently false.

God has already given us eternal life and we should know that we have present possession of it according to 1 John 5:11-13: “God *hath given* to us eternal life...these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may *know that ye have* eternal life”.

Eternal life cannot be lost no matter which way you spin it. If someone claims that you must continue to believe to continue possessing eternal life, it breaches the logic above—once you have initially believed, you have present possession of eternal life, and it cannot logically be lost given its description. To propose eternal life can be lost, irrespective of how you try to justify it (e.g., “you must remain in Christ by continuing to believe”), violates the nature of this attribute. Therefore, if a one-time belief is sufficient to grant the possession of eternal life, and *eternal* life cannot be lost, then continued belief is not a necessary condition to possess eternal life.

This point is further confirmed towards the end of John 5:24, which notes that the believer shall never come into condemnation and is *presently* passed from death into life. That declarative truth marks a present removal from the category of death, with no evidence to suggest one can pass from life unto death (which would require losing eternal life). In John 10:28-29, a powerful promise is made by Jesus:

John 10:28-29: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall *never* perish, neither shall *any man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and *no man* is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

To concede to the fact that the Father is greater than all (v.29) and then contend that you (someone who has been given eternal life) can pluck yourself out of the Father’s hand, is to imply that you are greater than God.

Ephesians 1:13 teaches that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit immediately upon having trusted Christ (“in whom you trusted”). This guarantee is irreversible, as believers are sealed “until the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30), meaning salvation is secure as long as the Holy Spirit is within them. Even if we grieve the Spirit, we are still sealed. The verse applies a temporal point of completion: unto (until) the day of redemption. A believer will continue to be sealed *until* a specific point in the future when redemption will occur. If I said that “I have sealed this vault until May of

next year,” I could not open that vault before that point without having lied. God cannot lie; therefore, a believer cannot lose the Holy Spirit. This argument for eternal security is strengthened by 2 John 1:2 (“the truth” 1 John 2:27) and John 14:16, where the Spirit’s permanent presence is assured. The Holy Spirit is essential to our regeneration, justification (1 Cor 6:11), possession of eternal life, and guarantee of final glorification (Rom 8:11).

The imputed righteousness of God by faith, or *justification* as Romans alludes to it (4:5, 4:24-25, 5:1, 10:4), is tightly associated with eternal life. God’s free gift of righteousness results in “justification of life” (Rom 5:18). Just as sin leads to death, grace leads to eternal life *through* righteousness (Rom 5:21). If you have been justified by faith, you have eternal life.

Romans 5:1 notes that we are currently justified (*dikaioō*) by faith (*pistis*). *Dikaioō* is in the aorist tense, although this will not be relevant shortly. Pay attention to the fact that people are justified by faith (Rom 4:5, 5:1). In v.9, Paul makes a promise, “Much more then, being *now justified* by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” Even if one debates the nuances of the aorist participle of *dikaioō*, the inclusion of *nyn* (*now*) indisputable proves that justification is presently possessed. The aorist participle is complex and can carry a range of meanings; while it would be possible to prove that justification is presently possessed using other context, the temporal qualifier of “now” removes all ambiguity. Paul’s argument is that because believers are *presently* justified by Christ’s blood, they have an assured hope of salvation from wrath. If anyone who is presently justified later went to the lake of fire, this verse would have been a lie.

In Romans 8:30, Paul establishes that if God predestined you, you were called; if you were called, you were justified; and if you have been justified at any point, you will be glorified (final resurrection). To suggest that someone who was justified can fail to achieve final glorification is to inconsistently break this chain in one place, but not in others. There is a logical and sequential relationship in which every state after the predestination is guaranteed. If not, an individual who did not get glorified would not have been properly classified as one predestinated *in the first place*. There is no individual whom God predestinated who will not be glorified, because he predestinated them *on the basis* that they would believe in him and obtain glorification. For an individual who was justified to not achieve glorification would breach that principle.

If faith (*pistis*) is the requirement to be justified, justification can be presently possessed, and a one-time justification guarantees final glorification, then saving faith (*pistis*) cannot mean faithfulness. No actions after your initial justification—including unbelief—can cause you to lose your salvation, proving that ongoing faithfulness is not required to be saved.

3.2 | Unfaithful and saved?

A simple way to assess whether the bible defines saving belief as faithfulness is to look at instances of believers who are not faithful (whether through abundant sin or leaving the faith). If the bible classifies even one apostate as saved or entered into the kingdom of heaven, then clearly faithfulness is not the proper definition of saving belief.

In 1 Thess 5:4-11, Paul reminds believers that our spiritual position is not in darkness, but that we are “children of the light” (“the day”, Eph 5:8). Because our position is in the day, he reminds us to not sleep “in the day” (v.6), but to watch, in order to not be surprised by Christ’s second coming. He contrasts our position in the day with those that sleep “in the night” (v.7).

To *sleep* in this context does not mean physical death seeing as Paul commands the Thessalonians to not sleep, but to be sober and vigilant (v.6). In this passage, a person can sleep both in the day and the night (as in real life). All unbelievers (those of the night) will be unexpectedly overtaken by the day of the Lord. Some believers (those of the day)—namely those who *sleep in the day*—will also be unexpectedly overtaken by the day of the Lord. Paul confirms that we aren’t appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation (v.9)—referencing our bodily glorification and escape from the wrath of God. Christ died for us (v.10) for the purpose that “whether we wake or sleep” (in the day), we *will live together* with him in heaven.

“That we should” (v.10) is not a deontological statement of something we *ought* to morally do. The purpose clause (ἵνα) and subjunctive (ζήσωμεν) construction express intent or result (e.g, John 3:16: “...that whosoever believeth in him *should not* perish”). Christ died for the purpose or with the intent that we will live with him (obtain salvation) *irrespective* of whether we are sober and vigilant in our lifestyle. Although we should be sober and love others in our walk (v.8), even if we do not, we will still live with him. This proves that the lifestyle of a saved believer has no bearing on their future glorification with him.

Perhaps the clearest example of believers who apostatized and yet still entered the kingdom of heaven is found in the Israelites. This group is noted explicitly to have believed (Ex 4:31, 14:31; Psa 78:22-57, 106:12-24). In Hebrews 3:12-19, Paul warns *believers* about the danger of falling into unbelief (v.12), going on to cite the Israelites as an example not to follow in v.13-19. The term *partaker* (*metochos*) in this context refers to sharing in the Christian experience—participating in its activities, afflictions, and blessings (1 Cor 10:20-23), much like the Israelites' opportunity to enter Canaan. However, in the following verses (15-19), Moses and approximately two million Israelites are cited as *examples* of those who fell away and ceased to be partakers.

Hebrews 3:18-19: And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but *to them that believed not?* So we see that they could not enter in *because of unbelief*.

Anyone who did not enter Canaan were not allowed *due to their unbelief*. Despite this, Moses and the Israelites—both of whom did not get to enter into Canaan—are included in the Hall of Faith (Heb 11:29), a chapter highlighting individuals who exemplified faith and secured their place in heaven. It would be strange to *only* exclude the Israelites as unsaved, when the rest of the saints in that chapter were indisputably saved. The inclusion of the Israelites demonstrates that falling away in

unbelief does not equate to the loss of salvation, proving that faithfulness is not the definition of saving faith.

In the parable of the sower (Luke 8:11-14, Matt 13:4-23), the belief fallen away from in Luke 8:13 must be *the same type of saving belief* as v.12. There's no indication that the *nature* of the word *believe* changes between the two verses. Those in v.13 received the same word of God that the devil took away from those in v.12, thereby completing the action (belief) the devil feared would result in salvation. Despite leaving the faith and being unfruitful, they were born of God (John 1:12-13, 1 Peter 1:22-23) and are saved. The belief that resulted in salvation cannot have been faithfulness since they "believe for a while then fall away", implying that *pisteuō* in both v.12 and 13 cannot mean faithfulness or ongoing belief. Not only does this debunk the argument that *pisteuō* necessarily means faithfulness, but it also provides strong evidence that the person who fell away is still saved.

The second soil had already fulfilled the sole condition noted to be saved in v.12 (to believe), which was evidently not continued belief. Both Acts 16:31 and Luke 8:12 note that belief results in salvation. If Luke 8:12 cannot be discussing ongoing faithfulness, it seems unlikely that Acts 16:31 would be discussing faithfulness as the condition to be saved. To assert that the belief in Acts 16 refers to faithfulness is inconsistent and creates separate categories of salvation: one as an initial salvation that doesn't depend on faithfulness, and another that mandates ongoing belief and faithfulness. The similar syntax ("*believe and be saved*," "*believe...and thou shalt be saved*") makes this unlikely without clear evidence that different types of salvation and belief are in mind.

In Matthew 5, Jesus gives an impossibly high standard of righteousness (v.27-48). To enter the kingdom of heaven one must have a superior righteousness, even exceeding that of the professed righteousness of the self-righteous Pharisees (Matt 5:20). Yet, the one who "shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so" will still be in the *same kingdom of heaven* as the one who kept the commandments (Matt 5:19). To have entered this kingdom, this person must have obtained perfect righteousness by faith (Rom 3:21-22, 10:4) apart from his moral commandment keeping or faithfulness. Although he is "least *in* the kingdom of heaven," he is still "in the kingdom of heaven". This same individual who broke God's commandments is also considered morally superior to John the Baptist; a man deemed the greatest born of a woman (Matt 11:11).

These statements seem perplexing and contradictory if understood superficially. Man's righteousness—that gained by his adherence to the law—cannot be the standard by which he is considered righteous (Matt 5:20) and by which he completes "the will of the Father" (Matt 7:21). All the evidence points to believing in Christ as the *only* way to obtain this righteousness and fulfill the will of the Father. A proponent of a works-based justification will struggle to counter this prior evidence. Given the nature of the "least in the kingdom," the will of the Father is defined as belief in Christ *at the exclusion of* actionable commandment keeping. This belief is the only way to enter into heaven (Matt 21:31-32)—the least in the kingdom must have fulfilled this requirement despite breaking God's commands (Matt 5:19). Thus, belief in Christ cannot encompass one's adherence to God's commandments (Matt 7:21-48, 22:36-40).

Paul expects to confront believers who are unrepentantly fornicating in 2 Corinthians 12:19-21. Despite their behavior, Paul calls them "dearly beloved", which always refers to the saints in Paul's letters. This is the same audience in Corinth that Paul called sealed by the Holy Spirit

(1:21-22), proving that one can be considered saved (and possess the Holy Spirit), even without repenting of severe sins.

According to Hebrews 6:1-6, if a believer falls away from the faith, it is impossible for him to repent again in the principle saving faith sense described in v.1 (from dead works to faith in God). If he could, it would spit on Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice, implying that it was not sufficient the first time (Heb 10:10-12). Therefore, you can only be saved once. That principle should be recognized and the believers should move on to bearing fruit. A conditionalist could concede that it is *impossible* to get saved again upon falling away from the faith. However, a more sound conclusion is that Paul is urging the brethren to move on to maturity because their salvation cannot be undone or repeated.

2 Timothy 2:11-13 reassures believers of eternal security, emphasizing that salvation is based on having died with Christ (2 Tim 2:11, Rom 6:5-11), which cannot be undone. V.12 warns that denying Christ may result in the loss of rewards or reigning in His kingdom, but it does not mean a loss of salvation. Belief is the only condition for eternal life (Acts 16:31, John 3:16), and suffering with Christ is distinct from believing in Christ (Philip 1:29).

V.13 affirms that even if a believer's stops believing (*apisteō*), Christ remains faithful to His promise, as salvation rests on His faithfulness, not human effort: "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself". The contextual promise that God is faithful to is v.11, that we will live with him, even if we stop believing. *Apisteō* (in all of its 7 instances) conveys the unbelief of individuals, proving that faithfulness is not a requirement to live with Christ.

In verses 17-19, Paul references Hymenaeus and Philetus, who spread false teachings that "overthrow the faith of some". Despite this, he emphasizes that God's foundation remains firm and that those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit still belong to Him (v.19). V.20 uses the analogy of a great house to illustrate that, while some believers are honorable and steadfast, others are weaker and prone to fall away, but all who have put their faith in Christ remain part of the body of Christ.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, the same audience ("ye") whom he calls "fallen from grace" (5:4) and "removed from God" for departing into a false gospel (1:6), he also calls *children* (3:26), *sons*, and *heirs* of God (4:7). For this reason, falling from grace cannot mean losing salvation, but instead likely conveys a departure from understanding the gospel of the grace of God.

An alternative explanation is that it is impossible to be fallen from Grace since it is contingent on being justified by the law—Paul is merely using rhetorical effect to demonstrate their folly in *attempting* to be justified by the law. In either case, the book of Galatians proves that one can depart in unbelief (e.g., to a false gospel of legalism) and still be saved. It is certainly not faithful to depart into a false gospel. To "continue in the faith grounded and settled" requires not being moved away "from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23). This aligns with Galatians 1:6, where departing from belief in the true gospel is considered departure from God. The terms "holy" and "unblameable" in Col 1:22 are not technical terms; in this context, they do not pertain to salvation, but proper moral standing before God (1 Pet 1:15-16, Rom 12:2, Titus 1:7, 2 Pet 3:14, 1 Cor 7:34, Philip 2:12-15, Heb 12:5-7).

3.3 | Commonly cited anti-eternal security scriptures

Conditionalists often seek to harmonize their interpretations of other biblical passages (e.g., John 15:1-6) with the clear biblical teaching that salvation is by faith (and faith alone as was demonstrated in part 1). These passages are cited as prooftexts for the idea that a believer can lose their salvation, that one must obey God's commandments to be saved, or that one must turn from their sins to be saved. This theological leaning makes it impossible to define saving belief in John 3:16 as a one-time acceptance of the gospel truth, apart from any perseverance or faithfulness. Most of these scriptures carry less hermeneutical weight in proving the definition of saving biblical faith, although they still have value. However, this article is not intended to address every passage that conditionalists frequently misinterpret—our ministry provides videos and books dedicated to that topic. Rather, the focus here is to present evidence against the claim that saving faith means faithfulness, especially as it relates to Greek grammar. The following is a list of the most commonly misinterpreted prooftexts used by conditionalists and Reformed individuals:

Pauline Epistles

• Rom 1:28-30, 2:6-10, 6:1-2, 8:13, 11:19-23, 14:23 ----
 Eph 2:10, 5:5 ---- 1 Cor 6:9-12, 9:27, 15:2 ---- 2 Cor 5:10, 5:17,
 13:5-6 ---- 1 Tim 4:1-4, 4:16 ---- 2 Tim 2:12 ---- Col 1:22-23 ----
 Gal 5:4, 6:7-9 ---- Philip 1:6, 2:12, 3:10-12 ---- Titus 1:16

Other NT Books

• Heb 2:3, 3:12-14, 3:6, 5:9, 6:4-6, 10:26-31, 12:14, 12:16-17 ----
 Acts 2:38, 5:32, 8:20-24, 14:22, 22:16 ---- James 1:12, 1:22-24,
 2:14-24, 5:19-20 ---- Rev 3:5, 3:15-16, 20:12-13, 22:14-15, 22:19--
 -- 1 Peter 3:20-21, 4:8-11 ---- 2 Peter 1:10, 2:20-21

John & The Epistles of John

• John 3:5-6, 3:19-21, 3:36, 4:36, 5:28-29, 6:47-58, 8:51, 12:25,
 14:15, 14:23-24, 15:1-10 ---- 1 John 1:9, 2:3-4, 2:19, 3:6-9, 5:16-17

The Synoptic Gospels

• Matt 5:8, 5:22, 7:15-20, 7:21-23, 10:22, 10:32-33, 10:38, 12:31-
 32, 18:8-9, 19:16-26, 25:36-47 ---- Mark 8:38, 16:16 ---- Luke
 3:8, 6:46, 12:45-47, 13:24

Summary of part 3

- Eternal life cannot end given its nature, marking saving belief as the moment you first obtain eternal life.
- The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a one-time justification guarantee final glorification, which makes it impossible for saving belief to be defined as faithfulness.
- There are several examples of individuals not being faithful in the Bible and still being considered saved.

Article Summary

This article refutes the claim that saving faith necessitates ongoing faithfulness. The argument that the Greek grammar—particularly the present tense and participles—indicate the continuous nature of belief in core passages (e.g., John 3:16) is assessed and countered with robust evidence. This places the burden on those who hold to the ongoing nature of belief to prove it with other forms of evidence. Contextual and lexical analysis shows that *pisteuō* (believe) and *pistis* (faith) denote a one-time act resulting in permanent salvation, independent of ongoing belief, obedience, or moral works. This evidence challenges the views of the conditionalist and Reformed camps and affirms the Free Grace position.

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