

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Evidential Problem of Assurance: Textual Approach from the Johannine Literature.

Submitted to Dr. Page Brooks,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

BIBL990-D05-202420

Dissertation

by

Derick Asare Adu

April 16, 2024

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Thesis Statement	1
Abstract	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Important Definitions	2
Relevant Prior Research	4
Pre-Reformation Church on Assurance of Salvation	4
Martin Luther, John Calvin and Jacob Arminius on Assurance	7
From the Puritans to John Wesley	10
Note on Epistemology	13
Delimitation	15
Summary of Chapters	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	18
Calvinists and Arminians	18
Assurance from Necessary Confirmatory Evidence	20
D. A. Carson	20
C. Samuel Storms: Kept for Jesus	22
Christopher D. Bass	24
I. Howard Marshall	26
The Grace Evangelical Society	27
Epistemic Justification in Revelation	32
The Language of Overcoming	32
The Non-Salvific View of Overcoming	34
The Salvific View of Overcoming	37
Summary of Chapter	38
Chapter 3: Methodology	40
Hermeneutics and Intended Meaning	41
Defining Literal Interpretation	43
Why Allegorical Method Is Rejected	45
In Defense of Literal Interpretation	47
Attitude Before the Reformation: Medieval Interpretation	48
Why the Allegorical Method is Inadequate	50
Language, Time, and the Grammatical-Historical Method	51
Figurative Language and the Grammatical-Historical Method	52
The Place of Presuppositions in Research	54
The Rationale For The Selection of Six Tests	57

The Relationship Between the Six Tests	58
Are The Six Tests Exhaustive?	59
Chapter 4: Textual Survey	60
Test One: Believing Test	60
The Benefits of Believing	62
The Object of Believing	63
Dimensions of Believing	64
pisteuō + hotī	64
pisteuō + eis	67
The object of <i>pisteuō + eis</i>	68
Synonymous Expressions of <i>pisteuō + eis</i> in John	69
Continuity of Believing	70
The Case of John 2:23-24	72
Believing and the Word	74
Believing and Obedience	75
Conclusion of Test One	75
Test Two: The New Birth Test	76
New Birth-Believing Equivalence	77
Meaning of Kingdom of God In The Context of John 3	77
Seeing and Entering the Kingdom of God	79
The Necessity of the New Birth	80
The Source of the New Birth	81
Evidence of The New Birth	84
The New Birth in the Johannine Epistles	86
The New Birth and Righteous Living (1 John 2:29)	86
The New Birth and Sin (1 John 3:9)	88
The New Birth and Love	90
The New Birth and Overcoming	91
Test Three: Keeping the Word Test	92
Link Between Believing and the Word in the Gospel of John	94
The Closing Ministry of Jesus: John 12	96
The Word in the Priestly Prayer of John 17	99
Keeping the Word and the Hope of Immortality	102
Continuity in the Word	104
Keeping His Commandments as the Test of Love	105
The Scope of Love	107
Jesus defines Those Who Love Him	107
Obedience and Love in I John	110
Keeping the Word As Test of Knowing Him	112

Keeping the Word in the Book of Revelation	115
The Sixth Beatitude	120
Characteristics of God’s End Time People: Revelation 12:17	121
Characteristics of God’s End Time People: Revelation 14:12	123
Test Four: Overcomers Test	124
Overcoming in the Gospel of John	124
Overcoming in the Epistles of John	125
Lust of the Flesh	127
Lust of the Eyes	128
Pride of Life	128
Overcoming In The Book of Revelation	130
The Identity of Overcomers	132
The Case for Eternal Life	134
Test Five: Discipleship Test	138
Discipleship in John 6	139
Two Barriers to Belief	141
Summary of John 6	145
Discipleship in John 8	145
Continuity As a Matter of Life and Death	151
Test Six: Abiding Test	152
Abiding and Fruit-Bearing	155
Fruitless Branch: Tended or Destroyed?	158
The Meaning of Fruit in the Johannine Literature	163
Fruits in the Context of John 15	166
The Inevitability of Fruit-Bearing	171
Abiding in the Epistles	172
Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions	177
The Conclusion from the Biblical, Theological, And Historical Survey	177
The Conclusion from the Believing Test	179
The Conclusion from the New Birth Test	180
The Conclusion from the Discipleship Test	181
The Conclusion from the Abiding Test	183
The Conclusion from Keeping the Word Test	184
The Conclusion from Overcomers Test	186
Final Word	187
Bibliography	189

Abbreviations

AB	The Anchor Bible
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSAC</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
CC	Concordia Commentary
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Christian Apologetics Journal</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Conservative Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTSJ</i>	<i>Chafer Theological Seminary Journal</i>
<i>DBSJ</i>	<i>Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal</i>
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EDNT	Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
EEC	Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
<i>EMJ</i>	<i>Emmaus Journal</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>FM</i>	<i>Faith and Mission</i>
<i>GJ</i>	<i>Grace Journal</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JMAT</i>	<i>Journal of Ministry and Theology</i>
<i>JODT</i>	<i>Journal of Dispensational Theology</i>
<i>JOTGES</i>	<i>Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
KJV	King James Version
MNTC	The MacArthur New Testament Commentary
MNTCS	Moffatt New Testament Commentary Series
NAC	The New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	New Bible Dictionary
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NCCS	New Covenant Commentary Series
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTTE	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIGNTC	The New International Greek New Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version

NLT	New Living Translation
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTL	New Testament Library
PCNT	Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>PP</i>	<i>Priscilla Papers</i>
<i>RAR</i>	<i>Reformation and Revival</i>
<i>RBTR</i>	<i>Reformed Baptist Theological Review</i>
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBS	Shield Bible Series
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TMSJ</i>	<i>Masters Seminary Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TRINJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Chapter One Introduction

Thesis Statement

This dissertation will examine all the relevant data in the Johannine literature to define or establish reliable epistemic justifications for a believer's assurance of salvation.

Abstract

Assurance of salvation is an existential issue that has occupied the center stage of theological deliberations in the Church's history. This dissertation is a quest for epistemic justification. The dissertation examines the conditions that justify and validate claims of assurance of salvation. The research is partly an epistemological quest as well as a textual inquiry. This study utilizes evidentialism, the epistemological concept that what provides epistemic justification is evidence, to reach a reasonable conclusion. The data for the analysis consists of the Johannine literature, that is, the Gospel of John, the three Epistles of John, and the book of Revelation. The research examines all the relevant linguistic and thematic data in the Johannine literature and concludes that (1) believing, (2) new birth, (3) discipleship, (4) abiding, (5) obedience, and (6) overcoming provides epistemological criteria for validating claims of assurance. Since assurance pertains to the current and future spectrum of salvation, the evidence must be a continuing experience. A person holds a false assurance when these validations are absent.

Introduction to the Problem

In the Gospel of John, Jesus grants those who hear and believe His words eternal life (Jn 5:24). In the same Gospel, Jesus did not trust the belief reposed in him by those who saw his

miracles and believed in his name (John 2:23-24). Considering the enigma above, what epistemic justifications exist for validating claims of assurance of salvation? In other words, is there some evidence to count on to sustain or verify a person's claim of assurance of salvation? This dissertation examines such epistemic standards for validating claims of assurance of salvation in the Johannine literature.

Important Definitions

The subject at stake is an epistemological issue. This is not a question of how a person attains salvation. Instead, it is an epistemological quest concerned with how a person knows their assurance of salvation is epistemically justifiable.¹ As such, this research seeks to explore the evidence of such certainty by looking at some essential definitions. Boyd defines assurance² as "the doctrine that those who are truly saved may know without a doubt that they are saved."³ Joel R. Beeke, who has written extensively on the topic, writes that it indicates an "undoubted certainty that I personally belong to Christ, possess His saving grace, and will ultimately enjoy

¹ In his work, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation, The Context, Root and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609*, Keith Stanglin nails this down: "At the heart of the debate is an existential angst. "It is the difference between asking, "How can one be saved?" and, "How can I know I am saved or elect?" The latter issue raised more than an academic question; it was a significant pastoral issue in the Church." Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation, The Context, Root and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 145.

² It is important to note that assurance in this case is not to be confused with the grounds of salvation. On this, John Murray provides a helpful distinction: "When we speak of the grounds of assurance, we are thinking of the ways in which a believer comes to entertain assurance, not of the grounds on which the salvation rests. The grounds of salvation are as secure for the person who does not have full assurance as for the person who has." (*Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977) 2:270.

³ Robert F. Boyd, "Assurance" in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 70.

everlasting salvation."⁴ In summary, assurance of salvation can be defined as an "undoubted certainty."⁵

Not everyone limits the definition of assurance to an epistemological quest for certainty, as defined above. Demarest, for example, argues that "assurance of faith or assurance of salvation denotes the confidence of the believer in Christ that notwithstanding his mortal sinful condition, he is irrevocably a child of God and an heir of heaven."⁶ For the sake of clarity, this dissertation provides definitions for the terms below:

- (1) Assurance: The certainty and genuineness of claim or Belief to be in a saving relationship with Jesus.
- (2) Basic Belief or foundational Belief: A belief that is assumed to be true without any proof.
- (3) Non-basic Belief: A belief that is formed on a basic belief.
- (4) Evidence: A reason for holding on to a proposition or Belief.
- (5) Evidentialism: The view that what provides epistemic justification is evidence.
- (6) Epistemic Justification: Generally, "*epistemic* justification (from *episteme*, the Greek word for knowledge) is the right standing of a person's beliefs with respect to knowledge."⁷ For the purpose of this dissertation, epistemic justification shall be defined as the right standing of a person's claim to assurance of salvation with respect to the characteristics of true assurance furnished by the data provided by the Johannine literature.

⁴ Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York, 1991), 3.

⁵ Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 146.

⁶ Bruce A. Demarest, "Assurance," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 91. Note how Demarest's definition adds that a person could have an assurance of salvation despite a sinful condition and that such certainty is irrevocable. This claim will later be examined in light of the data furnished by the Johannine Literature.

⁷[https://iep.utm.edu/epijust/#:~:text=Epistemic%20justification%20\(from%20episteme%2C%20the,more%20likely%20to%20be%20true](https://iep.utm.edu/epijust/#:~:text=Epistemic%20justification%20(from%20episteme%2C%20the,more%20likely%20to%20be%20true). Accessed 11/14/2022 at 9:52 am EST.

Relevant Prior Research

In a paper presented at the Annual Biblical Theology Lecture at Tyndale House in June 1990, Donald C. Carson noted the scarcity of a "full-scale treatment of the biblical theology of Christian assurance for more than fifty years" in English.⁸ What he states is not to say that there are no works at all. Among others, Carson recognizes the work of Yates⁹, Kendall¹⁰, and Beeke.¹¹ All three works cited above focus on historical studies.

Citing the above emphasizes that most of the works done on assurance take an interest in how the issue has been tackled throughout the history of the Church. The purpose of dialoguing with this historical flashback is simple. Instead of examining all the various dimensions of the assurance of salvation, this dissertation surveys the epistemic justifications scholars, commentators, and different faith traditions have provided for claims of assurance of salvation.

Pre-Reformation Church and Assurance of Salvation

In examining the previous work on this subject, I will follow Keathley's¹² lead by grouping the prior work into three broad schools of thought. The pre-Reformation view of Roman Catholic thought ties justification with sanctification, leading to a denial of the certainty of present assurance of salvation. Carson also notes that "the consensus in the period leading up

⁸ Donald A. Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance," *WTJ*, 1(Spring 1992), 3.

⁹ Yates writes about Christian assurance with respect to John Wesley in Arthur S. Yates, *The Doctrine of Assurance with Special Reference to John Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1952).

¹⁰ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979).

¹¹ Joel R. Beeke, "Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch 'Nadere Reformatie': From Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640–1760)" (Ph.D. diss., *Westminster Theological Seminary*, 1988).

¹² Kenneth D. Keathley, "Does Anyone Really Know If They Are Saved? A Survey of The Current Views On Assurance With A Modest Proposal," *JOTGES*, 15 (Spring 2002), 39.

to the Reformation treated such assurance as conjectural."¹³ Whereas the second view of the reformers advocated certainty of salvation, the post-Reformation idea's third view "saw assurance as a grace given after conversion and discerned by careful self-examination."¹⁴

Because Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas were instrumental in articulating the first view that the Council of Trent canonized, it will help to briefly survey these two theologians by beginning with Augustine. Augustine inextricably tied his understanding of the saints' final perseverance to God's sovereignty and predestination. For Augustine, the grace of God "which both begins a man's faith, and which enables it to persevere unto the end is not given in respect of our merits, but is given according to His own most secret and at the same time most righteous, wise, and beneficent will."¹⁵ Notice that Augustine placed election in the secret will of God. Since humans are not privy to God's hidden will, "Augustine does not believe that the Christian can in this life know with infallible certitude that he is in fact among the elect and that he will finally persevere."¹⁶ He even wrote that "it is uncertain whether anyone has received this gift so long as he is still alive."¹⁷

Augustine cast a long shadow over the medieval Church to the reaches of the Council of Trent. "He held that God's elect will certainly persevere but that one's election could not be infallibly known in this life—and that in fact, one's justification and baptismal regeneration

¹³ Carson, *Reflections on Christian Assurance*,” *WTJ*, 1 (Spring 1992), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Augustine’s *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance* (chap. 33).
<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105/npnf105.xxi.iii.xxxv.html>. Accessed 02/19/2023 at 9:27am EST.

¹⁶ Davis, “The Perseverance Of The Saints,” *JETS*, 2 (Jun 1991), 213-214.

¹⁷ Augustine’s *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance* (chap. 1).
<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105/npnf105.xxi.iii.xxxv.html>. Accessed 02/19/2023 at 9:27am est.

could be rejected and lost through sin and unbelief."¹⁸ This understanding of Augustine "set the parameters for Aquinas, for the Council of Trent, and for the Roman Catholic tradition generally down to the present day."¹⁹

In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas discusses perseverance under three senses. Firstly, as a mental disposition, "a man stands steadfastly, lest he be moved by the assault of the sadness from what is virtuous."²⁰ Secondly, perseverance is used ethically as when "a man has the purpose of persevering in good unto the end."²¹ In a third and more strictly theological sense, perseverance is "the abiding in good to the end of life"—that is, "final perseverance."²² Thomas' understanding of human free will shaped his view on perseverance. According to Davies "free will by its very nature is changeable, and this changeability is not taken away by grace," it leads to Thomas' conclusion that in the present life, it is not in the power of the human will, considered in itself, even though "repaired by grace, to abide unchangeably in the good."²³

While both Augustine and Aquinas taught the possibility of assurance, they denied the certainty of assurance of salvation. The Council of Trent, which codified the Roman Catholic position in its sixth session, stated, "Let no one feel assured of this gift with an absolute certitude, although all ought to have most secure hope in God."²⁴ Trent further stated, "No one

¹⁸ Davis, "The Perseverance of The Saints," *JETS*, 214.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Summa Theologica I-II, Q. 109, Art. 10.* translation of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1947). Quoted from Davis, "The Perseverance of The Saints," *JETS*, 214.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translations* (St. Louis: Herder, 1955), 238; quoted in Davis, "The Perseverance of the Saints," *JETS*, 34 (June 1991): 219.

can know with the certainty of faith, which excludes the possibility of error, that he continues in the grace of God."²⁵ Such certainty was anathematized in the words, "If any man hold trust, confidence, or assurance of pardon to be essential to faith, let him be accursed."²⁶ Since assurance of salvation was based on predestination and no one knew for sure, the council of Trent stated that "it is, in fact, impossible, apart from a special revelation, to know whom God has chosen for salvation."²⁷

Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jacob Arminius

Martin Luther's existential crisis occurred in the arena of assurance of salvation. His quest for peace and assurance through religious rites became elusive. Once Luther discovered God's grace, he wrote powerfully against denial of assurance by asserting, "We must daily more and more endeavor to destroy at the root that pernicious error that man cannot know whether or not he is in a state of grace, by which the whole world is seduced."²⁸ Luther was impatient with doubters. He insisted, "If we doubt God's grace and do not believe that God is well-pleased in us

²⁵ Quoted in F. Ernest Stoeffler, "The Wesleyan Concept of Religious Certainty—Its Pre-history and Significance," *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, series 6, 33 (April 1964): 132.

²⁶ Quoted in F. Ernest Stoeffler, "The Wesleyan Concept of Religious Certainty—Its Pre-history and Significance," *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, series 6, 33 (April 1964): 132. In addition to the above, the "Canons on Justification" restated these positions as follows. Canon 15: "If anyone says that a man who has been reborn and justified is bound by faith to believe that he is certainly in the number of the predestined, let him be anathema." In addition, Canon 16 stated: "If anyone says that he has absolute and infallible certitude that he will certainly have the great gift of final perseverance, without having learned this from a special revelation: let him be anathema." (*The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translations* (St. Louis: Herder, 1955), 244.

²⁷ Ibid. Quoted in Davis, "The Perseverance of the Saints," *JETS*, 218.

²⁸ Cited in Stephan H. Pfürtnner, *Luther and Aquinas, a Conversation: Our Salvation, Its Certainty and Peril*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964), 120. [Cited from Joel R. Beeke, "Martin Luther On Assurance" *RAR*, 4 (Fall 1998), 163-164.

for Christ's sake, then we are denying that Christ has redeemed us—indeed, we question outright all his benefits."²⁹

The writings of Luther provide strong evidence for testing or verifying claims of assurance. Primarily, Luther centered assurance on the trustworthiness of God's Word. He wrote, 'I have been baptized and I have the Word, and so I have no doubt about my salvation as long as I cling to the Word.' (*Works*, vol. 54, p. 57)³⁰ In addition, Luther provides other observable confirmatory evidence. An example is his comments on 1 John 3:19-20:

This is the *evidence* with which we *assure ourselves* of our calling and by which it is established that we are standing in the truth. If I am not moved by the weakness of my brother, I surely do not love him. From the *fruits* of love we can *learn* that we have love. Faith is established by its *practice*, its *use*, and its *fruit*. ...The consciousness of a life well spent is the *assurance* that we are keeping the faith, *for it is through works that we learn that our faith is true*.³¹

John Calvin established assurance "in both an objective and a subjective work of the Spirit."³² This was evident in his description of faith. "Now," he wrote, "we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence toward us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit."³³ Evidentially, God's word, the sacraments, and the illumination of the mind by the light of the Holy Spirit

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Davie, Martin, Grass, Tim, Holmes, Stephen R., McDowell, John, and Noble, Thomas A., eds. *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 72.

³¹ Luther, *Lectures on the First Epistle of John*, 238. Emphasis is mine. Quoted from Christopher D. Bass *That You May Know*, ed. E Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 27. Electronic Edition.

³² Noll, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," *BSAC*, 163.

³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, 8th ed., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 1:604 (III.ii.7).

provide this certainty.³⁴ In summary, Calvin located the evidence of salvation in God's word, the sacraments, and illumination by the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on tangible means of validating assurance leads Beeke to conclude that "Scripture, the Reformers, and post-Reformation men repeatedly offer the reminder that personal assurance of salvation *is recognizable by its fruits*."³⁵ Such fruits are recognized in an observation of "a close life of fellowship with God; a tender, filial relationship marked with childlike obedience; a thirsting after God and spiritual exercises that extol Him; a longing to glorify Him by the fulfillment of the Great Commission."³⁶

Beyond the magisterial reformers, Noll observes that two epistemic justifications crystalized and became prominent in later Reformed circles. First, he notes that "many English Puritans, such as William Perkins, affirmed that assurance of salvation was based on the direct witness of the Spirit in an individual's life."³⁷ The Westminster Confession of Faith echoed a similar stance that assurance of salvation "is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God..."³⁸ The quest for assurance of salvation on this note turns to an introspective look to an inward experience of the Holy Spirit.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:562 (IV.xiv.8).

³⁵ Joel R. Beeke, "Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith? Calvin and the Calvinists," *MSJ*, 1 (Spring 1994), 44. Emphasis is his.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Noll, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," *BSAC*, 164.

³⁸ *The Westminster Confession*, XVIII.2.

On the other hand of the spectrum, "Jonathan Edwards balanced the Reformed emphasis on the direct witness of the Spirit by contending that the fruits of a regenerated life are the final and most significant marks of assurance in the believer."³⁹ Edwards insisted, "it is manifest that Christian practice or a holy life is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go further and assert, that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences."⁴⁰ By turning into sanctified life or a lifestyle of holiness as the mark of assurance, Edwards provided a tangible standard of assessing a claim of assurance.

The inward witness of the Spirit and the outward demonstration of a holy life as standards of assessing assurance of salvation did influence Arminius. Noll argues that "Jacob Arminius combined these two emphases of Reformed theology and maintained that both the inward testimony of the Spirit and the fruits of faith impart assurance to the believer."⁴¹ It will be helpful to note that contrary to the Reformed view, "he claimed that one can have only present assurance of present salvation and never present assurance of final salvation."⁴²

From the Puritans to John Wesley

As heirs of the Reformed faith, Harwick observes that "the Puritan preachers did use the term 'assurance' a good deal, and a primary concern of their pastoral ministry was the generation

³⁹ Noll, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," *BSAC*, 164.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 406.

⁴¹ Noll, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," *BSAC*, 164.

⁴² *Ibid.*

of confidence in the mind of the believer."⁴³ The quest for assurance of salvation led the Puritans to the practical syllogism⁴⁴ intended to offer reasonable certainty. To questions such as "whether Christ died for you, whether God has drawn you, and whether you will persevere in faith and good works until the end of life,"⁴⁵ the practical syllogism was the answer. Wilkins observes that "the focus in the practical syllogism is external and subjective (i.e., good works, sanctification, transformation, perseverance)," and the objective is "to provide a way in which to verify that the cross and the promise of everlasting life apply to you."⁴⁶ Beeke agrees with Wilkins that it was a way of ascertaining and confirming a believer's assurance of faith when he notes that "the practical syllogism was based on the believer's sanctification and good works in daily life. It emphasized the believer's life of obedience that confirmed his experience of grace."⁴⁷

If salvation is grounded in God's inscrutable predestination, the practical syllogism provided a way to confirm that which was impenetrable. David McWilliams notes that the evidential purpose of the practical syllogism is even present in the writings of Calvin. He states, "We affirm that there certainly is a *sylogismus practicus* in Calvin, but it is a very carefully balanced matter, never confusing the *foundation* of assurance with the *evidences* and never

⁴³ Charley Hardwick and James O. Duke, eds., *American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion*, vol. 45, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, by John von Rohr (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 155.

⁴⁴ According to Beeke, the practical syllogism went like this: "Major premise: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith will receive the Spirit's testimony that their lives manifest fruits of sanctification and good works. Minor premise: I cannot deny that by the grace of God I have received the Spirit's testimony that I manifest fruits of sanctification and good works. Conclusion: I am a partaker of saving faith." Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 132.

⁴⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, "The Practical Syllogism And Assurance," *JOTGES*, 31(Autumn 2018), 19-33. See footnote 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁷ Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 132.

severing the *evidences* from the *foundation*."⁴⁸ Similarly, Beeke confirms that "Calvin did utilize the principles of the syllogism in a *practical* sense."⁴⁹ In a practical sense, the syllogism pointed to external validation of assurance of salvation. Sinclair B. Ferguson provides an apt summary:

What, then, is the function of the so-called practical syllogism? In its most basic form it is derived from this simple and all too obvious principle: high degrees of Christian assurance are simply not compatible with low levels of obedience. If Christ is not actually saving us, producing in us the obedience of faith in our struggle against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, then our confidence that he is our Savior is bound to be undermined, imperceptibly at first, but really.⁵⁰

Although John Wesley rejected the reformed view of perseverance, he nonetheless held the possibility of assurance for some believers. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit was the key for Wesley. He wrote, "Perhaps one might say, by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, I mean, an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."⁵¹ In summary, the search for the certainty of assurance ended with either an introspective look for inward evidence of the Holy Spirit or an outward look into the fruits of holiness. These were not mutually exclusive. The search involved both an inward look and external confirmation.

The historical review above demonstrates that although there is no unanimity between different Christian traditions on the exact primary and secondary grounds of assurance of

⁴⁸ David B. McWilliams, "Calvin's Theology of Certainty" in Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey G. Waddington, ed. *Resurrection and Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 525-526.

⁴⁹ Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 72.

⁵⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2016), 172.

⁵¹ Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Chiles, *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 95.

salvation, some agreement exists on some sort of confirmatory evidence of salvation. These confirmations include the internal witness of the Spirit, faith as certitude, a lifestyle characterized by holiness and obedience, and special revelation. This shows that regardless of denominational or theological persuasion, there is a consensus that evidence provides epistemic justification for holding assurance of salvation. Such is the evidence that will be examined in the Johannine Literature. However, before turning to a summary of the chapters of this dissertation, a word must be said about epistemology.

Note on Epistemology

Epistemology could be defined simply as the theory of knowledge. Epistemology probes into what constitutes knowledge and how we know what we know. One of the ways of accounting for knowledge and how we know is evidentialism. Fundamentally, it is a commonsense experience that reasons are needed for holding on to a proposition or a belief. An evidentialism is simply an approach to knowledge that states that epistemic justifications must be given for a particular belief or proposition.

Many philosophers have written extensively about grounding a claim or assertion on evidence. David Hume, for instance, writing about the inadequacy and fallibility of human experience as the basis of knowledge, wrote that "a wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence."⁵² William K. Clifford states even more strongly, "It is wrong always, everywhere,

⁵² David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, 1748/ 1777 ed., X 'Of Miracles', para. 87: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9662/9662-h/9662-h.htm>. Accessed 11/14/2022.

and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."⁵³ Dougherty's remarks below are also very insightful:

Evidence, it seems, is a central concern of epistemology. There are a number of reasons why this is so. First, consider this. If Reliabilism⁵⁴ were true and you wanted to know if the new health care bill was going to be good or bad, what would you do to find out? If contextualism were true, and you wanted to know if a prospective neighborhood was safe, what would you do? If some kind of virtue epistemology were true, and you wanted to know whether diet soda caused cancer, what would you do? In all the cases, the answer is obvious: you'd seek out evidence.⁵⁵

The presence of evidence provides safeguards against holding on to errors and false propositions. As noted by John Locke, "He that believes, without having any reason for believing, maybe in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error."⁵⁶ Holding on to untrue and fanciful ideas in life can have various implications, from the mundane and insignificant to serious and deadly ones. However, the impact of having a right/wrong or genuine/false assurance has eternal consequences. A cursory reading of the warning in Matthew 7:21-23 indicates that assurance can be grounded on a whimsical foundation. This is not a matter of the sincerity of holding the belief but the

⁵³ W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", *Contemporary Review* (1877); reprinted in Clifford's *Lectures and Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1879). The quotation is from p. 183.

⁵⁴ "Reliabilism is an approach to the nature of knowledge and of justified belief. Reliabilism about justification, in its simplest form, says that a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a reliable psychological process, meaning a process that produces a high proportion of true beliefs." Alvin I. Goldman, *Reliabilism*, 1998, doi:10.4324/9780415249126-P044-1. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/reliabilism/v-1>. Accessed 09/22/2023.

⁵⁵ *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

⁵⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959), IV. xvii. 24, pp. 413-14. We were led to this passage by Alvin Plantinga, who cites it in *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

genuineness of the basis of the claim. This dissertation employs an evidentialist approach to assessing the conditions under which a person's claim to having an assurance of salvation can be verified. That evidence plays a crucial role in epistemology cannot be overemphasized.

Delimitation

This dissertation assumes that the books designated as the Johannine literature, namely, the Gospels, the three Epistles, and the book of Revelation, have the same author. The research shall, therefore, not belabor the issues of Johannine authorship. Additionally, the primary focus of this research is a quest for evidence that provides a basis for a believer's assurance. As such, it shall ignore other themes in the Johannine literature that do not directly impinge on this epistemological quest. This dissertation also distinguishes different categories of assurance. For example, there is the confidence or assurance that God hears the prayer of His children as in the following text, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: (1John 5:14)." However, this dissertation will focus on the epistemic justification for claiming assurance of ultimate salvation as stated, for example, in this text: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1John 2:28).

Summary of Chapters

Chapter two offers a review of relevant literature, which surveys writings from Calvinist, Arminian and Free Grace theological persuasions. Further, it examines historical formulations and decisions of church councils and creeds. Textually, since there are no monographs devoted exclusively to the evidential problem of assurance from the perspective of the Johannine

literature, the survey focuses on biblical and exegetical works, citations from commentaries, periodicals, theological and biblical dictionaries, and lexicons.

Chapter three explains the methodology for the research. This study intends to use the historical-grammatical method of exegesis to study and analyze the relevant texts in the Johannine literature. This method of interpretation posits that there is a meaning in a text and "endeavors to identify the author's intended meaning based upon the way a word was used in ordinary conversation."⁵⁷ The method focuses on the literal meaning. "The literal meaning of a word or a sentence is the basic, customary, socially designated meaning."⁵⁸ In terms of breadth, the historical-grammatical method also makes room for metaphorical and figurative language. The method interprets metaphors, similes, personification, and symbolic language according to the genre and figure of speech. Since "recovering the author's intent remains the goal of much modern exegesis,"⁵⁹ this method will help recover what the author said about the evidence of assurance of salvation in the Johannine literature.

Since this is partly an epistemological quest, clarifying what counts as relevant data in this research is vital. As already stated, the data in this dissertation consists of the Johannine literature. But not everything written in the Johannine Literature is relevant to the evidential quest for assurance of salvation. Thus, after carefully reading the data, evidence of the assurance of redemption shall be gathered along lexical and thematical lines.

Following the different themes in the Johannine literature and their bearing on assurance of salvation will be the major approach to gleaning the relevant data. Whatever gives a hint, an

⁵⁷ Bruce A. Baker, "Complementary Hermeneutics And The Early Church," *JMT*, 1 (Spring 2003), 45.

⁵⁸ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970), 120.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

idea, a condition, or a standard that furnishes affirmative or confirmative evidence of assurance of salvation shall be considered as evidence. Since the lexical spectrum of salvation is comprehensive, evidence shall also consider any word, phrase, clause, sentence, or passage that asserts or gives a confirmation of having a saving relationship.

Chapter four examines epistemic standards for assessing claims of assurance from the Johannine corpus. The chapter surveys textual analysis of the data under six different tests, namely (1) the believing test, (2) the new birth test, (3) the discipleship test, (4) the abiding test, (5) the keeping of the word test, and (6) the overcomer's test. Each of these tests examines additional sub-categories. The chapter further interacts with Calvinist, Arminian, and Free Grace perspectives on the evidence of assurance.

The thesis climaxes in chapter five, which integrates all the evidence and justifications for assessing claims of assurance from the data from the Johannine corpus. From the data, internal and external factors validate claims of assurance. The conclusion focuses on external validations since the internal factors are not amenable to assessment. All claims of assurance of salvation must present evidence that squares up with the standards in the Johannine literature. The dissertation highlights the Johannine literature's contribution to the ongoing dialogue on the evidential problem of the assurance of salvation.

Chapter Two Literature Review

This chapter surveys works on the evidence of assurance that interact with the Johannine Literature. Some of the available literature includes the works of D. A. Carson, Sam Storms, Christopher Bass, and I. Howard Marshall. While all the authors above do not agree on everything about assurance, they all at least agree that based on the aspects of the Johannine data, there is secondary and necessary confirmatory evidence of assurance.

At the other side of the fence are the works of the Grace Evangelical Movement (henceforth designated as GM). The chapter examines the works of Arthur L. Farstad, J. B. Hixon, Dennis M. Rokser, Kenneth D. Keathley, Robert N. Wilkin, R. T. Kendell, Richard A. Seymour, John Niemalä, and Thomas L. Stegall. These are some of the prominent scholars and writers from this camp. Whereas all these writers agree that confirmatory evidence assurance is critical, writers from the GM perspective do not think affirmative evidence is necessary for validating assurance. The literature review examines writers from these two biblical-theological persuasions.

Calvinism and Arminianism

Scholars from Calvinist and Arminian persuasions have long debated the doctrine of assurance of salvation along a notable specific theological faultline: whether or not a person will persevere to the end. In 1998 the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* ran a forum titled *What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?* Carl F. H. Henry, D. A. Carson, Scott Hafemann, Charles Tackett, and C. Ben Mitchell examined the topic of assurance in their writings. Henry noted that while “Arminians insist that such passages as Luke 8:9–15, Galatians 5:4, and Hebrews 2:14, 3:7–4:13, and 6:4–6 imply that a believer can defect

from faith,” Calvinists on the other hand, by citing as evidence such passages John 6:37, 10:28, 17:6–11 “contend that one who is genuinely redeemed by the Saviour cannot forfeit salvation.”⁶⁰

This theological faultline also provided the background for I. Howard Marshall’s doctoral research culminated in the book *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*. Marshall writes:

The point which impresses one when reading some Calvinist authors is that they tend to accept the doctrine of final perseverance on philosophical and dogmatic grounds. For the Calvinist the doctrine of perseverance can be regarded as a corollary of the doctrine of the predestination of particular individuals to salvation. The Arminian, for his part, may argue for the possibility of loss of salvation from his doctrine of the freedom of the human will to accept or reject salvation. The only hope of moving beyond these two points of view would appear to lie in a thorough study of the New Testament evidence. It is in an attempt to provide this that the present survey has been undertaken.⁶¹

This research focuses on that which unites both Calvinists and Arminians. Instead of framing the discussion around the possibility of apostasy or persevering to the end, it focuses on the quest for evidence and epistemic justifications. As part of this research, it seeks to glean from the Johannine Literature valid justifications for holding an assurance of salvation. Moreover, it examines writers who have interacted with the epistemic reasons of assurance in the light of the Johannine literature. Since there are very few direct interactions with the subject, it will also make inferences where appropriate.

⁶⁰ Carl F. H. Henry in “The SBJT Forum: What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?” *SBJT*, 1 (Spring 1998), 65. [64-74] According to Henry, these passages demonstrate that “one who is genuinely redeemed by the Saviour cannot forfeit salvation.”

⁶¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 1995), 26.

Assurance From Necessary Secondary Confirmatory Evidence

D. A. Carson

D.A. Carson’s writings provide astute insights into the concept of assurance in both the epistles and the gospel of John. Carson observes how 1 John furnishes information on the epistemic justification for assurance. He notes that John “explicitly tells us that he has written “these things” to believers so that they may know that they have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13).”⁶² This remark ties in with the assertion: “repeatedly we come across some such formula as “This is how we *know* we are in him” (1 Jn 2:5) or the like.”⁶³

Although the Gospel of John is not as explicit as 1 John, Carson notes that it nevertheless contributes to our understanding of assurance of salvation, primarily through faith and discipleship. He notices significant evidential distinctions, especially regarding “the nature of spurious belief and false discipleship.”⁶⁴ According to Carson, discipleship “assumes no “easy believism”—and that in turn raises some questions in principle about anyone’s claims to have assurance if they are demonstrably falsified by a continuously perverse life.”⁶⁵

⁶² D. A. Carson in “The SBJT Forum: What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?” *SBJT*, 1 (Spring 1998), 65.

⁶³ Ibid. Norman Geisler elaborates on the specifics of this Johannine “knowing” in the remarks below: “Throughout his first letter John lists ways we can “know” now that we are one of God’s elect, namely, if we keep his commandments (1 John 2:3); keep his word (2:4); walk as he did (2:5); love the brethren (3:14); love in deed, not just word (3:19); have the Holy Spirit within us (3:24); love one another (4:13); and do not continue in sin (5:18 d. 3:9). In short, if we manifest the fruit of the Spirit, then we have the presence of the Spirit in our hearts and manifest his fruit in our lives (d. Gal. 5:22-23). Then we can be assured we are of the elect. We do not have to wait until we meet Christ to know that we belong to him. The first fruit of the Spirit is agapic love. Paul informs us what its unmistakable characteristics are (1 Cor. 13)” Norman Geisler, “A Moderate Calvinist View” in *Four Views on Eternal Security*. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids : Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 80.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

By asserting that assurance can be “demonstrably falsified by a continuously perverse life,” Carson demonstrates that genuine discipleship is incompatible with a life of perversity. Such observation is crucial since it provides a standard to test claims of assurance based on discipleship. Aside from the discipleship test, Carson acknowledges that even though eternal life is available through Jesus Christ through faith, he quickly adds that there is a distinction between genuine and spurious faith.⁶⁶ Carson turns to John 6 and 8 to differentiate real versus spurious faith and discipleship.

John 6 records the conversation between Jesus and the disciples who pursued him for loaves He had fed the multitudes. After challenging the masses to eat his flesh and drink his blood, many of the disciples reasoned that “this is a hard saying” (John 6:60)⁶⁷ and “From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Commenting on the secession of the disciples in John 6, Carson aptly remarks that although the disciples who left Jesus had followed him previously, “they were not disciples in the sense that they were prepared to follow him and his teachings regardless of what he said.”⁶⁸ This comment is insightful. According to Carson, following Jesus and His teachings becomes a test of genuine discipleship.

Carson strengthens his argument that a genuine disciple holds on to the teachings of Christ by citing John 8:31, where Jesus declared, “To those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” In summary, although Carson

⁶⁶ Ibid., 67. There could be a number of reasons Jesus did not commit himself to those who believed in him in John 2:23-25. Carson sees this as a case between true and spurious faith and concludes, “Clearly, not all professions of believing, even believing in Jesus’ name, are genuine.”

⁶⁷ Quoted from the KJV.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

discourages undue introspection, he concludes that “because eternal life, regeneration, genuine conversion, *inevitably* transform life, an utter lack of transformation rightly calls into question the genuineness of one’s profession of faith.”⁶⁹ By this conclusion, Carson provides genuine transformation as a standard to measure any claim of assurance of salvation, even in a secondary sense. Perhaps the apt remarks by A. A. Hodge give a summary of Carson’s observations above: “Perseverance in holiness, therefore, in opposition to all weakness and temptations, is the only sure evidence of the genuineness of past experience, of the validity of our confidence as to our future salvation.”⁷⁰

C. Samuel Storms: Kept for Jesus

In the book, *Kept for Jesus*,⁷¹ C. Samuel Storms, past president of the Evangelical Theological Society, examines three pertinent chapters⁷² from the Gospel of John that have a bearing on the evidence of assurance. First, Sam surveys John 6:37-44 and argues that God draws people who cannot resist His drawings to Jesus. Consequently, such people are guaranteed eternal life. He contends that “the certainty of ultimate and absolute salvation for those who

⁶⁹ Ibid. Emphasis his. Carson also writes elsewhere. “‘Disciples’ must be distinguished from ‘the Twelve’ (cf. vv. 66–67). More importantly, just as there is faith and faith (2:23–25), so are there disciples and disciples. At the most elementary level, a disciple is someone who is at that point following Jesus, either literally by joining the group that pursued him from place to place, or metaphorically in regarding him as the authoritative teacher. Such a ‘disciple’ is not necessarily a ‘Christian,’ someone who has savingly trusted Jesus and sworn allegiance to him, given by the Father to the Son, drawn by the Father and born again by the Spirit. Jesus will make it clear in due course that only those who *continue* in his word are *truly* his ‘disciples’ (8:31). The ‘disciples’ described here do not remain in his word.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 300.

⁷⁰ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949 [1878]) 544.

⁷¹ Sam Storms “*Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁷² John 6, 8 and 10.

come to the Son is reaffirmed in verses 38–40.”⁷³ In addition to the text above, he cites John 10 to emphasize that no one is able to snatch the sheep from the hand of the father.⁷⁴ What is missing in this discussion is how a person can know that he has been drawn to Jesus or is part of the safe sheep in the fold.

Storms elucidates this quest for evidence by telling a story about Charley, a vibrant young man raised in Church who later abandoned his faith in college. Storms anticipates how different faith traditions will account for Charley’s backsliding. His assessment and conclusion are insightful: “No! Never, ever, give assurance of salvation to someone who is persisting in unrepentant sin, regardless of how allegedly sincere they were when they allegedly believed in Christ. I may not have the right to tell Charley that he isn’t saved. After all, only God knows our hearts. But I certainly will never give him the assurance that he is.”⁷⁵

In the case of Charley, Sam concludes: “But if Charley persists in unrepentant sin and hard-hearted unbelief, he will by his lack of perseverance demonstrate that in all likelihood, he never knew Jesus, and Jesus never knew him. On that basis you can rest assured that I will never give him a false assurance of salvation simply because he claims once to have genuinely trusted Christ.”⁷⁶ By these remarks, Storms demonstrates that being safe in the Father’s keeping, as he argues from John 6 and 10, does not preclude a sober assessment of one’s lifestyle.

⁷³ Storms, *Kept for Jesus*, 20.

⁷⁴ Although other scholars have argued that this does not preclude a person exercising freewill to opt out of the Father’s hand, this is not the focus of this research. The focus of this research is how a person knows he is part of Christ’s fold.

⁷⁵ Storms, *Kept for Jesus*, 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

Storms remarks on John 8 add additional yardsticks for measuring claims of assurance. He distinguishes between a Spirit-wrought, authentic saving faith and “fickle faith.”⁷⁷ A person must therefore know whether his faith is genuine or spurious to have a true assurance of faith. Here again, Sam appeals to some forms of external validations from John 8. He observes:

Yet another example is found in John 8 where John refers to certain Jews who had “believed” in Jesus (v. 31). Yet according to the verses that follow, these people are in fact slaves to sin (v. 34), indifferent to Jesus’s word (v. 37), and children of the Devil (v. 44). They accuse Jesus of being demonized (v. 48); they are liars (v. 55) and guilty of mob tactics, including attempted murder of the one they have professed to believe (v. 59). They are said to have believed but are clearly not only unsaved but among the enemies of Jesus.⁷⁸

In discussing the three possible interpretations of the fruitless branch in John 15, Storms agrees to a third option, seeking confirmation of assurance in a life of holiness. He notes:

The other option for those who believe in eternal security is to understand the fruitless branches to be so-called disciples who experience only an external, superficial connection with Jesus. Although they believe and follow Jesus in one sense, their outward allegiance and verbal commitment to him is not the expression of having trusted Jesus sincerely for salvation. The fruitless branches, therefore, are not saved and never were.⁷⁹

Christopher D. Bass

Christopher Bass' work on I John provides ample room to interact with 1 John since the entire book interacts with the question of assurance in the epistle. Bass' work seeks to answer the question, "What is the nature of the believer's assurance of eternal life in the first letter of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41. It is interesting to note that both scholars from Arminian and Calvinist persuasions agree on the evidential nature of assurance in John 15. For example, although Norman Gulley does not subscribe to the doctrine of Eternal Security as held by Storms, he essentially agrees with the evidential aspects of his interpretation of John 15. On John 15:7, 9, Gulley writes, “This is a metaphor for the saving relationship God wants to see continued throughout our lives, for union with Christ is the only way to remain in a saved relationship.” Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 697.

John?"⁸⁰ He grounds the believer's assurance of salvation on the person and work of Jesus Christ (1:1-2:2; 4:9-10; 5:18), who is the believer's ("advocate") with the Father (2:1) and the ("propitiation") of their sins (2:2; 4:10).⁸¹ Bass gives the rationale for grounding assurance on Jesus Christ as follows:

Given that sin is inevitable in the life of the believer (1:7-2:2; 5:16-17), nothing other than the work of Christ can be viewed as the foundation of assurance, for it is the only effective remedy for their sins and thus the only ground for confidence of right standing with God. Moreover, it will be argued that assurance is not only grounded in the past work of Jesus on the cross but also on the promise of His ongoing work of protecting those who have been born of God (5:18).⁸²

Bass writes that although salvation is grounded in Jesus Christ, the data from 1 John provides other vital external corroborating evidence for assurance of salvation. "While assurance is fundamentally grounded in the work of Christ," he continues, "this letter also demonstrates that the lifestyle of the believer serves as a vital corroborating support for such assurance."⁸³ According to Bass, the evidence becomes evident "in the numerous sets of criteria or "tests" that occur throughout the letter."⁸⁴ These tests provide a standard for "introspection and subsequent reassurance."⁸⁵ He maintains that the Holy Spirit, which indwells and empowers believers to walk according to the light, "should produce *a change of life* in the new covenant believer that is *observable in the public arena* and therefore able to be tested and validated."⁸⁶ In addition to

⁸⁰ Christopher D. Bass *That You May Know*, ed. E Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 20. Electronic Edition.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Emphasis not mine.

providing an epistemic justification for a person's basis of assurance, Bass argues that "these tests have a *retrospective* aspect."⁸⁷ Bass' conclusion:

Therefore, the thesis of this study is that the letter of 1 John teaches that assurance of eternal life is *fundamentally grounded* in the work of Christ and supported in a *vital* yet *subsidiary* way by the lifestyle of the believer. One's lifestyle is "vital" in that if a person fails to keep the commands, love the brethren, and have a right confession of Jesus, he demonstrates that he was never a child of God and should have any false assurance eradicated. It is "subsidiary" in that the letter also teaches that no one lives perfectly holy (1:6-2:2; 5:16-17), so the believer must continually look back to the work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness and cleansing of sin.⁸⁸

I. Howard Marshall

Evidence of assurance of salvation is also discernable in the book of Revelation. One of the themes in the book is the idea of overcoming. In his survey of the subject of perseverance, I. Howard Marshall perceptively notices that this theme of overcoming in the book of Revelation is intertwined with some specific acts. "Christians," he writes, "conquer when they resist sin, persist steadfastly in the works of God, hold fast to their faith, and resist the demonic power even to the point of death."⁸⁹ Marshall continues that "if a person fails to be victorious, his faith must be regarded as of doubtful character."⁹⁰ Further, evidence of the outworking of genuine faith includes faithfulness even to death (Rev. 2:10), keeping the commandments of God, endurance of trials, and doing deeds consistent with obedience to God.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid. 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 21-22.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁹⁰ Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, 174. Marshall cites Revelation 17:14 to further underline the fact that the conquerors in Revelation will be the called and the chosen who will be characterized by their faithfulness and allegiance to the lamb.

⁹¹ Ibid., 174-175.

In summary, although Marshall focuses on perseverance, his overall conclusion identifies some insights into the epistemic justifications for assurance of salvation. Whereas he seeks evidence of assurance from overcoming, allegiance to the lamb and keeping God's commandments in the Book of Revelation, in the Gospel of John, this consists of hearing and following the words of Jesus.⁹² Finally, concerning the epistle of John, he notes, "a person who continues in sin has no claim to be regarded as one who has been born of God."⁹³

The Grace Evangelical Society

The Grace Evangelical Society was founded in 1986. The editorial board expressed *the raison d'être* of the existence of the Grace Evangelical Society in the first publication of their flagstaff journal, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*.⁹⁴ The maiden edition stated that "the

⁹² Marshall writes: "It is through this continual abiding that a person remains one of Christ's sheep. While he remains in this relationship he knows that he is preserved by the father and the Son and looks forward to the life of heaven. He believes in the words of Jesus, that no one shall snatch him out of His hand. But He also knows that this promise is true only for those who hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him, and that therefore he must continue to follow and trust him." Ibid. 185.

⁹³ Ibid., 188. In addition to the works cited above, Demarest clearly delineates the secondary necessary basis of assurance in his work below. "(1) Doctrinally, believers can be assured of justification and eternal life on the basis of Christ's deity, atoning death, and victorious resurrection from the dead as attested by the Scriptures (John 4:14; 5:24). Paul, for example, wrote that Christ "was raised to life for our justification" (dikaiosis, Rom 4:25). Because of who Christ is and what he has done, believers may know that they belong to him forever. John makes this crystal-clear by his eightfold use of "we know" in 1 John 5. (2) Morally, Christians gain assurance of being *united with Christ in a saving relationship* forever *as they obey God's commands* (1 John 2:3, 5; 3:24). (3) Relationally, the saints gain assurance *as they spontaneously perform loving deeds toward others*. John wrote, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue *but with actions and in truth*. This then is *how we know* that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence" (1 John 3:18-19; cf. 4:7). And (4) experientially, believers gain assurance of salvation through the presence and power of the Spirit in the heart. In the words of Paul, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:16; cf. v. 15; Gal 4:6). Hear John's plain affirmation, "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13). Add to the foregoing the subjective experience of the peace and hope God grants to justified believers (Rom 5:1-2) and assurance can be a glorious, experiential reality." Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, General Editor John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1997), 379.

⁹⁴ Arthur L. Farstad, "An Introduction To Grace Evangelical Society And Its Journal," *JOTGES*, 1 (Autumn 1988), 3.

old Gospel of grace has become blurred and even distorted,”⁹⁵ and that “it is this deplorable situation that has created the need for the Grace Evangelical Society.”⁹⁶ For the GM, assurance of salvation is the “certainty that one is eternally secure simply by faith in Jesus.”⁹⁷ Such assurance is “based only on the promise God makes in His Word that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ alone possesses everlasting life (John 5:24; 1 John 5:9-13).”⁹⁸ This requires no external validation of assurance since a belief, intellectual or cognitive assent of faith⁹⁹ in Christ

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid. The Grace Evangelical Society will hence be referred to as the GM, that is, the Grace Movement.

⁹⁷ <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/> Accessed June 26, 2022.

⁹⁸ This understanding may possibly be one of the ways of understanding the Protestant Reformation itself, especially, from the writings of Luther and Calvin. It is generally acknowledged that during the Protestant Reformation, *sola fide* occupied the center stage of the theological debate with the Catholic Church. The singular weight granted to *sola fide* relegated obedience and even the good works produced through the agency of the Holy Spirit to the background. Reflecting on the work of these two prominent Protestant Reformers, Paul Rainbow argues that in “the Protestant outlook, imputation is the thing that saves.” He continues, “Good works are required of the regenerate afterwards, but not with a view to any further aspect of salvation. Justifying righteousness and the righteousness of sanctification rest on different causes, operate in separate spheres, and serve disparate ends. They have nothing to do with each other.” Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 35. Rainbow draws this conclusion from the writings of Luther and Calvin and their claim that “nothing we do, whether before grace or after, counts a whit toward our standing in God’s eyes.” (*Luther’s Works* 26.122-4 (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann; 55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-[vol. 1-30]; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957- [vols. 31-55]; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.11.14 (ed. John T. McNeil; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vol.; Library of Christian Classics 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 744) Quoted from *ibid.* 34.

⁹⁹ It is important to know how saving faith is defined by the Grace Movement. J. B. Hixon describes what saving faith is not by contrasting the Reformed Faith with the Grace Movement’s understanding of faith: Saving faith, according to Reformed soteriology, not only must be quantified (i.e., have the correct object), but *qualified* if it is to produce eternal salvation. That is, it must be the right *kind of faith* if it is going to result in eternal salvation. *Real* saving faith, it is suggested, has three components each identified by a Latin designation: A knowledge element (*notitia*), which is understanding the content of truth (i.e., mentally comprehending it); an agreement element (*assensus*), which is the mental assent to the truth (i.e., agreement that it is true); and a volitional element (*fiducia*), which is the personal determination to submit to the truth. Thus, it is said, eternal salvation is gained by acknowledging, accepting, and obeying the demands of the gospel. Only when all three components are present can one be said to have *truly* believed the gospel. (J. B. Hixon, *The Evangelical Crises No One Is Talking About: Getting the Gospel Wrong* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013), 257-258. Hixon dismisses the above and argues that “Saving faith occurs when one believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died and rose again to pay his personal penalty for sin and the one who gives eternal life to all who trust Him and Him alone for it.” (*ibid.*) Hixon is not alone in this. Rokser adds that “assurance never comes from looking at the nature of our faith but at the object of our faith—the all-sufficient Savior.” Dennis M. Rokser, “Can You Know for Sure You Are Saved Forever?” in

is a sufficient ground of assurance—nothing more and nothing less.¹⁰⁰ To be consistent, this is the case, even if a person lives in sin and disobeys the Lordship of Christ.¹⁰¹ The maiden edition of their journal articulated the claim above as follows:

The sole condition for receiving eternal salvation from hell is faith (trust) in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died a substitutionary death on the cross for man’s sin and rose from the dead. Repentance, rightly defined as a change of mind, is an integral part of this saving faith. No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one’s sin, baptism, or submission to the Lordship of Christ, may be added to, or considered as a part of, faith as a condition for receiving eternal.”¹⁰²

For repentance to be consistent with the GM’s view of faith, repentance is defined only as a change of thinking. After examining how repentance has been understood, Wilkins, writing in

Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology eds. J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire and Roy B. Zuck (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), 299.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth D. Keathley, “Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 168. Following this same train of thought Myers writes: “Free Grace writers have been saying all along that those who add works as a necessary result of justification are in reality making works a condition for getting into heaven. If the works we perform are a necessary result of justification, then those works are also a condition for getting to heaven, and therefore, eternal life is not by faith alone. Faith alone in Christ alone, without any kind of works, truly is the only Gospel of grace.” Jeremy D. Myers, *Good Works: A Necessary Result of Justification?* *CTSJ*, 10 (Spring 2004), 10.

¹⁰¹ Dennis Rokser argues that it is possible for a genuine believer (once-saved-always-saved) to be barren, unfruitful, shortsighted, and live in persistent carnality. According to him, while such a Christian “cannot lose the eternal security of his salvation, he may lose the personal assurance of it by losing spiritual perspective.” Further he continues: “The Bible actually teaches that it is possible for one who is eternally saved by God’s grace to ...(1) commit idolatry and apostasy (1 Kg. 11:1-10) (2) believe only for a while (Luke 8:13) (3) not continue in the Word of Christ (John8:31) (4) not abide in Christ (John 15:1-8) (5) become disqualified in the race of the Christian life (1 Cor. 9:24-27) (6) resist God’s chastening and correction to the point of physical death (1 Cor. 11:30-32) (7) stray from the faith (1 Tim. 1:5-6) (8) shipwreck faith (1 Tim. 1:18-20) (9) fall away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3) (10) deny the faith (1 Tim. 5:8) (11) cast off initial faith and follow Satan (1 Tim. 5:12-15)(12) stray from the faith by loving money (1 Tim. 6:9-10) (13) stray from the faith by professing false doctrine (1Tim. 6:20-21) 14) deny Christ and be faithless (2 Tim. 2:11-13)(15) have faith overthrown (2 Tim. 2:14-18).” Dennis M. Rokser, “Can You Know for Sure You Are Saved Forever?” in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology* eds. J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire and Roy B. Zuck (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), 312, 339-340. Also see Zane C. Hodges, “We Believe In Assurance Of Salvation,” *JOTGES*, 42 (Spring 2009):11-24; R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 52-53.

¹⁰² Farstad, An Introduction, *JOTGES*, 7-8 .

the GM tradition, argues that “the change-of-mind-secure-salvation view is the biblical one.” He continues, “If a person must give up something or even be willing to do so to obtain salvation, then it is not really a free gift. If one must live an obedient life to keep salvation, then it is conditioned upon faith plus works, and grace is nullified.”¹⁰³ Moreover, unlike the Arminian and Calvinist traditions that distinguish between assurance of present and final salvation, the Grace Movement makes no such distinctions. “When someone believes in Christ for everlasting life, his salvation is final (e.g., John 3:16–18; 5:24; 11:26). Once saved, always saved. Present salvation is final salvation. There is no other kind.”¹⁰⁴

It must be stated fairly that the GM does not entirely dismiss the role of good works. Only the GM contends that “good works, which can and should follow regeneration, *are not necessary to a firm assurance of eternal life* even though they may have a secondary, confirmatory value.”¹⁰⁵ Anything beyond a cognitive faith in Christ proves useless in the quest for epistemic justification of assurance. The faith that saves excludes obedience, commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one’s sin, baptism, or submission to the Lordship of Christ. In

¹⁰³ Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation Part 1: The Doctrine of Repentance in Church History,” *JOTGES*, 1 (Autumn 1988), 20. See also Lewis Sperry Chafer, “A Voice from the Past: The Terms Of Salvation,” *JOTGES*, 1 (Autumn 1988): 35-57. The Grace Movement is very insistent on this point. Kendall expresses a similar view: “I therefore state categorically that the person who is saved—who confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead—will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith. In other words, no matter what sin (or absence of Christian obedience) may accompany such faith.” R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Robert N. Wilkin, “A Review of Matthew C. Hoskinson’s “Assurance of Salvation: Implications Of A New Testament Theology Of Hope” *JOTGES*, 32 (Autumn 2019), 20.

¹⁰⁵ Farstad, An Introduction, *JOTGES*, 7. Emphasis mine. Also see Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 188-189. Assessing the place of works in the writings of Luther and Calving, Rainbow concluded: “Once justified, as surely as fire produces light and heat, so faith produces works. *But these works have no influence on the already settled verdict.* At most works count as subsequent evidence of justifying faith. Justification is thus altogether other than, prior to and independent of, sanctification.” Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), xviii. Emphasis mine.

conclusion, since faith, defined as “a change of mind,” is the only condition for appropriating full assurance of salvation, it follows that epistemic justification of assurance of salvation must not be sought in a life of obedience, turning from sin, and submission to the Lordship of Christ.

In John 8, Jesus made a clear call to discipleship for those who believed in him. It is interesting to note how proponents from the GM approach this. To maintain that assurance is based on believing alone, it posits a distinction between believers (who have been saved through faith) and disciples (who become lifelong learners after they have been saved through faith). This distinction becomes the lens to interpret passages such as John 8:31. In his discussion of John 8:31, Seymour argues, “It is one thing to trust Jesus Christ for salvation. It is another thing to be taught by Him, to learn from Him, and to follow Him in service.”¹⁰⁶ For the GM, “John’s Gospel teaches that at the point of faith, one has eternal life and knows it” and that “John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47, etc., prove that everlasting life comes at the moment of belief.”¹⁰⁷ The GM’s interpretation of John 8:31 aligns with the view that saving faith in the promise of eternal life is the only valid basis of assurance.

In summary, the GM provides no tangible epistemic basis for assessing a claim to assurance of salvation. Although there is secondary confirmatory evidence of assurance, since these are not necessary for salvation, they become irrelevant for determining claims of assurance. According to Kendall, a person who believes in Christ “*will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith*” (italics his).¹⁰⁸ Kendall inquires, ““What

¹⁰⁶ Richard A. Seymour, “Examining Difficult Passages Concerning Eternal Security” *CTSJ*, 14 (Spring 2009), 37.

¹⁰⁷ John Niemelä “Free At Last! Freedom In Jesus’ Footsteps (John 8:30–32)” *JOTGES* 31(Autumn 2018), 69.

¹⁰⁸ Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, 49.

if a person who is saved falls into sin, stays in sin, and is found in that very condition when he dies? Will he still go to heaven?’ The answer is yes.”¹⁰⁹ He concludes, “I, therefore, state categorically that the person who is saved—who confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead—*will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith.*”¹¹⁰

Epistemic Justifications in the Book of Revelation

Very little has been written on the evidence of assurance of salvation in the book of Revelation. Again, a distinction must be made between the grounds of assurance and the secondary confirmatory evidence. Revelation is clear that it is the duo of the lamb's blood and the word of the testimony of God's people coupled with an attitude of selfless love (Rev. 12:11) that makes overcoming possible. However, the question remains. How can a person be assured that his or her assurance is justified by the data provided by the book of Revelation? This is the major task of this section. How does Revelation describe the heirs of salvation? What are the characteristics of the heirs of salvation? What are the standards against which claims of assurance can be measured and thus justified epistemologically?

The Language of Overcoming

In writing, “And they overcame *him* by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11), John asserts that there is a singular entity who poses as the antagonist against the Lamb and His followers. This

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

entity is the opponent that needs overcoming (Rev. 12:11). The challenges addressed in the seven churches and the rest of the book are multi-prongs of Satan's battle against the lamb and his followers.

Against the seven churches, he wields weapons of hatred, force, bloody persecution, sex and sensualities, toxic and deadly doctrines, spiritual lassitude, and self-deception. His footprints are traceable throughout the corridors of all the churches in Revelation 2-3. He lurks behind the chilly winds of dying love in Ephesus, the cruel sword of persecution in Smyrna, the seductions and immorality in Pergamos, the concoctions of false and noxious doctrines in Thyatira, the spiritual lethargy and deadness in Sardis, the synagogue of Satan against the church in Philadelphia and the deadly spell of self-deception of Laodicea. Marshall is correct that "Christians conquer when they resist sin, persist steadfastly in the works of God, hold fast to their faith, and resist the demonic power even to the point of death."¹¹¹

If Revelation repeats several times that enjoying God's eschatological blessings is tied to overcoming, how are we to understand this overcoming? Is overcoming tied to final salvation or just to final rewards? How this is answered is crucial. If overcoming is linked to final rewards alone, then the data furnished by Revelation cannot provide epistemic justifications for assurance of salvation. However, if overcoming is tied to salvation and rewards, then the overcomers' terms or conditions and the overcomers' characteristics will provide some valuable data for assessing assurance. This leads to examining the salvific and non-salvific views of overcoming in Revelation below.

¹¹¹ Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, 174.

Non-Salvific View of Overcoming

The GM view holds that eternal life is contingent on believing alone, and therefore, overcoming relates to rewards meant for overcomers. Proponents argue that "this distinction between salvation and rewards is a major defining feature of Free Grace theology."¹¹² For Stegall, one of the proponents of this view, "eternal life is a gift from God based on Christ's work for us (Isa. 55:1-3; John 4:10, 14; Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Rev. 22:17), whereas rewards are compensation from God based on our work for Christ."¹¹³ By this distinction, any examination of the believer's work, whether obedience, faithfulness, or overcoming, has no bearing on a person's salvation and therefore offers no valuable data for evaluating a claim to assurance of salvation.

The soteriological rationale is clear: "If a transformed earthly life is truly "necessary" at the final judgment and this transformation of a believer's life depends even to the slightest degree on the believer's responsibility to walk in faith and obedience to God's will, then eternal salvation is not solely the work of God, and it cannot be by faith alone."¹¹⁴ The inner logic of this soteriology cannot harmonize with any notion that allows any human contribution to salvation beyond mental assent to the promise of salvation.

Stegall continues that overcomers can either be a particular class of believers "who merit a reward from Christ because of their faithfulness in distinction to unfaithful, carnal believers

¹¹² Thomas L. Stegall, "Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ," in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology* eds. J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire and Roy B. Zuck (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), 435. The rationale for this distinction is stated as follows: "Since salvation can not be simultaneously "apart from works" and "according to works labor," there must be a distinction between salvation and rewards. Eternal life cannot be a reward (*misthos*) "according to works labor" and at the same time be a gift from God (Rom. 6:23) given "apart from works" on the basis of grace (Titus 3:7)." Ibid., 439.

¹¹³ Ibid., 439.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 436.

who do not practically overcome sin, Satan, and the world” or “all believers in Christ.”¹¹⁵ He dismisses the first option in favor of the case that overcomers refer to all believers for the reasons below. First, he contends:

Overcomers in Revelation 2-3 are all believers because in every reference to the Greek words for victory’ or overcoming (*nikos, nike, or nikao*) in the New Testament prior to the book of Revelation, all believers are identified as already being over comers, victors, or victorious (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5) through their union with the overcoming One, Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:20; Luke 11:22; John 16:33; Rom. 3:4; Rev. 5:5; 17:14).¹¹⁶

Strangely though, contrary to the tenor of Revelation 2-3, he insists that believers “can still be overcome practically by evil in their earthly lives”¹¹⁷ and still be overcomers. Secondly, he argues, “the phrase “he who overcomes” (*ho nikon*) in Revelation 2-3 does not indicate ongoing practical victory as a Christian.”¹¹⁸ As long as a person has believed in Jesus Christ in the past, the person identifies forever with Christ, the victorious one and therefore is an overcomer even if the person does not experience practical victory over sin.¹¹⁹ Thirdly, “whenever the overcomer is mentioned in Revelation, it is always in contrast to the unsaved—never to carnal or immature Christians (12:11; 15:2; 17:14).”¹²⁰ Fourthly, “if only faithful believers are considered “overcomers,” then the body of Christ will be divided into two groups—

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 463.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 463-464. He quotes Cook approvingly on this “every church saint is an overcomer in standing even if not in practice.” W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 173. Here Stegall commits the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer by downplaying the role context plays in an understanding of a word. Revelation 2-3 does not argue that the recipients were already overcomers. It is a call to overcome.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 464.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 465

the spiritual/ faithful group of “overcomers” versus the carnal/unfaithful group of nonovercomers.”¹²¹

In essence, overcomers embrace all those who have ever believed in Christ sometime in their life. It does not matter whether they live in carnality, practice evil, or are faithful to Christ. Their position in Christ makes them overcomers, not their response to the call to overcome. Stegall provides a summary of this position as follows: "Since you are already overcomers by your position in Me, the Overcoming One, and you are guaranteed ultimate spiritual victory (glorification) on that basis, won't you fight the good fight of faith now in the arena of this earthly life?"¹²²

Others within the GM argue that “not all believers are overcomers”¹²³ Overcomers are only a subset of believers. In this view, overcomers only receive special privileges. As far as salvation and eternal life are concerned, all believers, including overcomers and nonovercomers, are equally secure. In conclusion, all these views from the GM offer no evidence for examining a person’s assurance of salvation as far as overcoming is concerned since overcoming is a non-soteriological issue.

¹²¹ Ibid., 466-467. This objection wrongly assumes that persistent carnal believers are still saved. “Even persistently carnal believers in the present (1 Cor. 3:1-4), though they may be chastened to the point of death (1 Cor. 11:30-32), are still full-fledged members of His body (1 Cor. 12; 12:12-27).” Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 468. This explanation begs the question. Why would Christ call those who are already overcomers to overcome? Why make promises contingent on overcoming if the recipients are already overcomers? Why would there be a call to repentance repeated five times with threats to those who are already overcomers?

¹²³ Wilkin makes this claim by appealing to the seven letters of Revelation 2-3. He writes, “The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible, but it does not guarantee it. Only believers walking in the light actually do overcome by means of the blood of Christ.” Robert N. Wilkin, “Benefits Of Christ’s Blood: Restricted And Unrestricted?” *JOTGES*, 22, (Autumn 2009), 9. Joseph C. Dillow, in his book *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*, also writes: “The teaching that all Christians are overcomers lack, it seems to this writer, adequate Scripture base. It is better to see the overcomer as the faithful Christian in contrast to those who fail to persevere to the final hour.” Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Miami, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co. 1992), 478.

The Salvific View of Overcoming

The second view argues that Revelation knows no non-overcoming believers. “Overcoming” is identified as a “conditional promise of salvation.”¹²⁴ The calls for repentance in Revelation 2-3 affirm the point mentioned earlier. “Five of the seven churches must repent to be counted among those who overcome.”¹²⁵ Overcomers contrast non-overcomers identified as “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.” (Rev. 21:8)¹²⁶ The final destination of nonovercomers is “the lake which burns with fire and brimstone,” and their ultimate fate is “the second death.” (Rev. 21:8) Unlike nonovercomers, overcomers “inherit all things” and enjoy new status as God’s sons. (Rev. 21:7) Overcoming embraces ultimate salvation and rewards. Revelation is silent on rewards for nonovercomers. Wong argues for the salvific view of overcoming by using the example of the appeal to the church in Pergamum. He writes:

Christ’s words to the Pergamum church offer further clues that it is correct to associate the manna with all His people. (a) He told idolaters and immoral people that He will wage war against them with the sword of His mouth (cf. Rev. 19:11–12). These nonovercoming idolaters and immoral people are not saved people who will enter the New Jerusalem but miss out on the blessing of the manna; rather, they are the unsaved who will not be in the city (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Eph. 5:5–6; Rev. 9:20–21; 21:8; 22:14).¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Robert L. Muse, “Revelation 2—3: A Critical Analysis Of Seven Prophetic Messages,” *JETS*, 29 (Jun 1986), 157.

¹²⁵ Stephen L. Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes”: A Fresh Look At What “Victory” Means For The Believer According To The Book Of Revelation,” *JETS*, 2 (Jun 1995), 195.

¹²⁶ For additional discussion on the seriousness of the warnings and the necessity of overcoming, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 142-213.

¹²⁷ Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Hidden Manna and the White Stone in Revelation 2:17,” *BSAC*, 155 (Jul 1998), 349.

Yates is also correct that nonovercomers are doomed. He writes that “during the Great Tribulation, all believers will function as overcomers, for by contrast, anyone who submits to worshiping the beast will be eternally condemned (Rev. 14:9–12).”¹²⁸ He continues that these overcomers will also keep their faith in Jesus. He writes, “This does not mean that works save these Tribulation saints. It simply means that they will not buckle when tested. Since the resurrected Tribulation saints will include only overcomers (20:4), it is clear that no Tribulation saint will recant (Rev. 20:4).”¹²⁹

Summary of Chapter Two

The quest for assurance of salvation is a quest for certainty. In the face of human frailty and bent towards sin, it is understandable why some find “human good works a source of eventual uncertainty . . . and find divine mercy alone a sure source of assurance.”¹³⁰ However, the quest to eliminate the necessary role of confirmatory evidence in salvation has its biblical and theological challenges and inadequacies. Among others, if faith in Christ alone or “the imputed righteousness of Christ is itself a sufficient ground for acceptance with God, why should God demand further evidence of righteousness in the lives of the believers?”¹³¹ Since the intent of this

¹²⁸ Richard Shalom Yates, “The Function of the Tribulation Saints,” *BSAC*, 163 (Apr 2006), 224.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Eugene F. Rogers, ‘Good Works and Assurance of Salvation in Three Traditions: *Fides Praevisa*, the Practical Syllogism, and Merit, *SJT*, 50 (1997), 131-56.

¹³¹ Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 210. Rainbow further notes: “To say with the Reformers and their ideological heirs that good works are indeed mandatory in the Christian life but are in no way constitutive of our righteousness in the eyes of God nor relevant to salvation, not only flies in the face of Paul’s grammar and comprehensive teaching about justification, but also, as touching substance, denies the ultimate reason which makes obedience to God’s will imperative for the believer. . . Antinomians seize upon the dichotomy between justification and renewal and conclude, inexorably, that good works are strictly irrelevant and unnecessary for salvation. On this view, theoretically one could be saved by faith alone despite a complete want of obedience.” *Ibid.*, 210.

research is a quest for evidence of assurance rather than an adjudication between Calvinist/Arminian versus the Free Grace Movement, it will be noted that the faith as assent only or the faith in Christ alone basis of assurance leads to a theological *coup de sac* since it eliminates the secondary basis of assurance.

On the other hand, unlike the Grace Movement, Arminian and Calvinist theological traditions agree that perseverance is essential to final salvation regardless of their contention about the possibility of apostasy or persevering to the end. This series of confirmatory evidence provide epistemic standards for evaluating claims of assurance. In other words, a claim of assurance of salvation is epistemically justifiable when measured against the primary and secondary corroborating evidence provided in Scripture. This dissertation examines the secondary confirmatory evidence of assurance from the Johannine literature.

Chapter Three Methodology

Chapter three examines the methodology for the research. This study intends to use the historical-grammatical method of exegesis to study and analyze the relevant texts in the Johannine literature.¹³² The method of interpretation posits that there is a meaning in a text and “endeavors to identify the author’s intended meaning based upon the way a word was used in ordinary conversation.”¹³³ The method also assumes that biblical interpretation aims at giving a sense of the text and causing others to grasp the meaning of Scripture.¹³⁴ The chapter attempts to defend the historical-grammatical method as the best method for this dissertation. Since the research is principally a textual inquiry that seeks to understand what the author of the Johannine literature wrote and meant, the historical-grammatical method, which seeks to unveil the meaning of a text by examining the grammatical aspect of a text in its historical setting becomes an appropriate tool for approaching the text.

The methodology for this dissertation also intersects with aspects of Biblical Theology. While encyclopedias, books, and journals use the term Biblical Theology, there is no unanimous definition of Biblical Theology.¹³⁵ J.L. McKenzie has observed that Biblical Theology ‘is the only discipline or sub-discipline in the field of theology that lacks generally accepted principles, methods and structure. There is not even a generally accepted definition of its purpose and

¹³² The historical-grammatical method seeks to unveil the meaning of a text by examining the grammatical aspect of a text in its historical setting becomes an appropriate tool for approaching the text. Since the research is principally a textual inquiry that seeks to understand what the author of the Johannine literature wrote and meant, the dissertation concentrates heavily on the grammatical and literally aspects. In addition, the meaning of the passages examined have no historical issues.

¹³³ Bruce A. Baker, “Complementary Hermeneutics and The Early Church,” *JMT*, 1 (Spring 2003), 45.

¹³⁴ Kenneth R. Cooper, “A Survey of the Case for Literal Interpretation of the Scriptures,” *JDT*, 10 (Sep 2006), 18.

¹³⁵ Charles H. H. Scobie, “The Challenge Of Biblical Theology” *TYNBUL* 42:1 (NA 1991), 31.

scope.”¹³⁶ In the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* Kristar Stendahl states that Biblical Theology deals with what the biblical text ‘meant.’¹³⁷ In harmony with Stendahl’s definition, the research (1) pursues authorial intent by (2) looking at the text as it stands to uncover what the author of the Johannine literature meant. This literary approach seeks “to look not through the text to the history which lies behind it but at the text as it stands.”¹³⁸ The biblical themes embodied by the six tests are investigated through the Biblical Theological method above.

Hermeneutics and Intended Meaning

Grant T. Osborne writes in *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* that evangelical hermeneutics aims to discover “the original or intended meaning of a text.”¹³⁹ Such a quest in a postmodern context, characterized by “incredulity toward meaning”¹⁴⁰ and where advocates contend that the original meaning of a text is irrecoverable, is indeed a daunting quest. However, if it is true that the meaning of a text is irretrievable, the whole quest for truth crumbles.

Whether or not there is an intended objective meaning in a text has broad-range implications. Some see the finality of an objective interpretation of a text as a powerful

¹³⁶ J.L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1974) 15.

¹³⁷ K. Stendahl, ‘Biblical Theology, Contemporary’, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, Abingdon 1962), Vol. 1, 418-32.

¹³⁸ Scobie, “The Challenge Of Biblical Theology” *TYNBUL* 42:1 (NA 1991), 44.

¹³⁹ Grant T. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 24.

¹⁴⁰ This is Kevin Vanhoozer’s amendment of Lyotard’s famous definition of the postmodern condition as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984]) See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 16.

epistemological hegemonic tool. Vanhoozer, for example, points out that “The motive behind Derrida’s strategy of undoing stems from his alarm over illegitimate appeals to authority and exercise of power.” For Derrida, “the belief that one has reached the single correct meaning (or God, or Truth) provides a wonderful excuse for damning those with whom one disagrees as either “fools” or “heretics.”¹⁴¹ Biblical authority is destroyed when one concedes that recovering the author’s intended meaning is impossible. Therefore, the dread of the possibility of the misuse of authority must not hinder the quest for authorial intent or deny the possibility of finding authorial intent.

This dissertation assumes that the quest for meaning is possible and begins with a given text, in this case, the Johannine literature. Thomas Baurain is right when he notes that “the meaning of any biblical passage or book, indeed, the meaning of anything written, resides in the text being examined and is determined by the author of the text, not by the interpreter.”¹⁴² Suppose the text is a bearer of truth. In that case, it stands to reason that “the interpreter’s function is to uncover by careful and diligent examination the meaning that the author intended to communicate to his original readers.”¹⁴³ In addition, the interpreter is not at liberty “to impose his meaning or any other foreign meaning onto the text of Scripture. That would not be exegesis; that would be eisegesis.”¹⁴⁴

Similarly, Kevin J. Vanhoozer "contends that biblical interpretation must begin with an appreciation of the fact that *truth is expressed in the interface between an author's discourse*

¹⁴¹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 21-22.

¹⁴² Thomas Baurain, “A Short Primer on Hermeneutics,” *JDT*, 10 (Dec 2006), 43.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

(*interpreted in context*) and the way things are."¹⁴⁵ He laments the grave consequences of dismissing the author and his intent. He writes, "There is a tendency in certain contemporary approaches to interpretation to lose the author, either because the author is historically distant or because the author has drowned in the sea of linguistic indeterminacy. This lostness is a loss, a death, and with the author's death goes what may be the last best hope for a criterion of validity."¹⁴⁶

Vanhoozer again notes that although the context is vital to interpreting a text, the tragedy is that "today the context or location of the reader has become more significant for biblical interpretation than the context of the author."¹⁴⁷ Such a displacement of emphasis leads to a distortion of authorial intent and leads away from a legitimate understanding of a text. Since this is a quest for understanding authorial intent, this research utilizes the grammatical-historical method, which seeks to understand the meaning of a biblical discourse as intended by the author.

Defining Literal Interpretation

Although the phrase "grammatical-historical" was "coined by Karl Augustus Theophilus Keil in his work entitled *Elementa Hermeneutices Novi Testamenti* (translated into Latin by

¹⁴⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger "Introduction" in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 16. Emphasis in original. One of the ways of understanding the relationship between an author's discourse and its relationship to the real world, that is, the way things are is conveyed by the terms "*verba*" and "*res*" and how they have been understood throughout the history of interpretation. (John H. Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation," *JETS*, 44 (Jun 2001), 197). These terms date back to Augustine's book *On Christian Doctrine*. "Augustine's basic formula was that "words signify things." "Words" are parts of language; "things" are what "words" point to." (Ibid.,197). Sailhamer explains the complex relationship between words and things as follows: *Words* point to (signify) *things*, but *things* also can point to (signify) other *things*. All *things* get pointed at by *words* (literal sense), but some *things* also point to other *things* (figurative sense). (Ibid., 197).

¹⁴⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics" in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 95.

¹⁴⁷ Vanhoozer, *Lost in Interpretation?*, 96-97.

Christoph August Emmerling; Leipzig, 1811),"¹⁴⁸ the method dates as far back to the Antiochan School. In the work entitled *The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers*, Robert W. Bernard writes, "What one can learn from the extant Antiochene writings is that their writers had no use for Alexandrian allegorical interpretation. The school of Antioch founded its approach on consideration of the literal text: its literal meaning, grammar, and historical context."¹⁴⁹ Since the meaning of literal interpretation is not univocal, it stands to reason to define how this research uses it.

A literal approach to interpretation can mean "interpreting God's Word the way one interprets normal human communication."¹⁵⁰ Similarly, as Caird writes, "words are used literally when they are meant to be understood in their primary, matter-of-fact sense."¹⁵¹ The matter-of-fact sense considers the words, grammar, and their historical context to determine the meaning intended by the author. Thomas Hartwell Horne summarizes:

Further, in common life, no prudent and conscientious person, who either commits his sentiments to writing or utters anything, intends that a diversity of meanings should be attached to what he writes or says; and, consequently, neither his readers, nor those who hear him, affix to it any other than the true and obvious sense.... The Literal Sense of any place of Scripture is that which the words signify, or require, in their natural and proper acceptance, without any trope [figure of speech], metaphor, or figure, and abstracted from mystic meaning.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Sailhamer, "The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation," 195-6. Sailhamer provides a context for the coining of this phrase as follows: "Keil was attempting to update the central thesis of Ernesti that the Bible should be studied like any other book from the ancient past. For Keil that meant the Bible should be studied according to the newly developed historical consciousness introduced by Johann Salomo Semler (1753–91), a student of the celebrated Sigmund Jakob Baumgarten at the University of Halle in the early eighteenth century." Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Robert W. Bernard, "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, edited by Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 63.

¹⁵⁰ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 47–48.

¹⁵¹ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 133.

¹⁵² Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (Boston: Littell and Gay, 1868), I:322, quoted in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical*

Why Allegorical Method is Rejected

Before explaining the grammatical-historical method, a word will be said about the Alexandrian School with its allegorical method, why it does not foster grasping authorial intent, and why this research rejects its approach. The allegorical method of interpretation builds on allegory, “a form of extended metaphor.”¹⁵³ In this interpretive model, “actions, objects, and persons in the biblical narrative are equated with meanings outside the narrative itself.”¹⁵⁴

Bigalke observes that “the “outside” meaning has moral, political, religious, and social significance, in which historical characters are mere personifications of abstract concepts such as good and evil. Therefore, an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal and symbolic meaning.”¹⁵⁵

According to the allegorical method, a text has a hidden deeper esoteric or spiritual meaning beyond its surface superficial literal meaning. The goal of the exegete is to uncover the hidden meaning. In contrasting the allegorical and the grammatical-historical methods, Bigalke writes:

The allegorical school considers the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture as an insignificant step toward the deeper, hidden meaning of a biblical passage. The hidden meaning is thought as more profound and spiritual than a literal method of interpretation. Whereas the grammatical-historical method attempts to understand the meaning of the

Interpretation (Third revised edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 121, bracketed insertion is Ramm’s. Quoted from Cooper, “A Survey of the Case for Literal Interpretation of the Scriptures,” 19.

¹⁵³ Ron J. Bigalke, Jr. “: Historical Survey Of Biblical Interpretation,” *JDT*, 14 (Aug 2010), 35. Similarly, Baurain writes: “Allegorical interpretation is defined as creating a level of meaning completely foreign to the author’s intentions by the fanciful use of figurative language. However, unlike legitimate use of figurative language, allegorizing is often farfetched, absurd, or unreal. Meanings are imported into the text by the interpreter. Rather than attempting to determine the author’s intended meaning, allegorical interpretations are highly subjective and liable to change with the moods and feelings of the interpreter.” Baurain, “A Short Primer on Hermeneutics,” *JDT*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Bigalke “Historical Survey Of Biblical Interpretation,” *JDT*, 35.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

original writer, the allegorical method neglects the original intent in search of a deeper and more spiritual meaning.¹⁵⁶

The Greeks employed the allegorical method to allegorize the writings of Homer and Hesiod at a time “the general population was drifting from the study of these works and becoming more atheistic and even denying the place of religion.”¹⁵⁷ As described above, “the allegorical method,” Ramm writes, “arose to save the reputation of ancient Greek religious poets.”¹⁵⁸ Once the Greek myths were allegorized, the meaning moved from literal to spiritual interpretation, thus forestalling the embarrassment created by the legends.

Greek allegory was passed on to the Christian Church through luminous figures like Clement of Alexandria and his successor Origen¹⁵⁹ who had significant influence in the church.¹⁶⁰ Among other things, Origen taught that the meaning of Scripture “is to be taken figuratively” (*De Principiis* 2.11.2),¹⁶¹ and to think otherwise is foolishness. Besides, he insisted that Scripture is not explained “according to the historical, but according to the spiritual method of interpretation” (*De Principiis* 1.3.3).¹⁶² Origen limited the comprehension of Scripture to a select few. However, the Scripture was inspired by the Spirit of God. He says only those

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵⁸ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Bigalke notes a possible motivation for Origen’s adoption on the allegorical method. “The literal interpretation of Scripture was the Jewish method of interpretation and it was regarded as incorrect because they crucified the Messiah.” Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Origen, *Origen De Principiis*, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (1886; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 4:297.

¹⁶² Ibid. 4:252.

“bestowed in the word of wisdom and knowledge,” like himself, can comprehend the meaning (*De Principiis*, preface, para. 8).¹⁶³

In Defense of the Literal Interpretation

The adoption of the Allegorical method was not left uncontested. A significant debate emerged “between the church in Alexandria and the church in Antioch of Syria. Whereas the Alexandrian School was strong in allegorizing, the Antiochan School was strong in literal interpretation,”¹⁶⁴ the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Irenaeus (ca. 120-2-2) and Chrysostom (354-407) were at the forefront of the grammatical-historical approach. Irenaeus, educated by Polycarp and Papias, “was a stern defender of the literal interpretation of Scripture as opposed to allegorical interpretation. He did not ignore symbols and types in Scripture, but always sought the plain sense of the biblical text.”¹⁶⁵ Another church father who stood on the side of the grammatical-historical method was John Chrysostom. Terry notes that “Chrysostom is unquestionably the greatest commentator among the early fathers of the church.”¹⁶⁶

Chrysostom wrote not less than six hundred biblical expositions and “demonstrated that the only

¹⁶³ Ibid. 4:241. Additionally, Bigalke notes: “The literal return of Christ was spiritualized to a generic individual experience with Christ. Moreover, when Christianity became the state religion under Constantine the idea of an earthly kingdom was not as important as when the church was being persecuted.” Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, 40. Ramm also traces the development of the allegorical method along a similar line in his remarks below: “The allegorical system that arose among the pagan Greeks, copied by the Alexandrian Jews, was next adopted by the Christian church and largely dominated exegesis until the Reformation, with such notable exceptions as the Syrian school of Antioch and the Victorines of the Middle Ages.” Ramm, *Biblical Interpretation*, 28.

¹⁶⁴ Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, *JDT*, 40.

¹⁶⁵ Larry V. Crutchfield, “The Early Church Fathers and the Foundation of Dispensationalism Part V—Dispensational Concepts in The Polemicists: Irenaeus,” *CTJ*, 3 (April 1999): 31. Quoted in Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, *JDT*, 40.

¹⁶⁶ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 649.

validity of a meaning beyond the literal was the practical application that made the passage relevant for all times.”¹⁶⁷

Attitude Before the Reformation: Medieval Interpretation

Despite the robust defense of the literal method as mentioned above, the “allegorical method continued as a dominant form of hermeneutics”¹⁶⁸ during the Middle Ages (600-1500), as noted by Bigalke:

During the Middle Ages (600-1500), hermeneutics experienced a transitory period from the prior influence of the Church Fathers until the Reformation. Allegorical interpretation continued as a dominant form of hermeneutics and was developed into four types of meanings: (1) literal; (2) allegorical; (3) moral; and, (4) anagogical. According to this methodology, a passage such as Isaiah 2:1-4 can have four meanings. The literal meaning of “Jerusalem” is the actual historical city. The allegorical meaning would be the influence of the church throughout the nations. The moral meaning is the requirement of the believer to teach biblical truth to others. The anagogical meaning is the heavenly Jerusalem, according to a passage like Hebrews 12:22.¹⁶⁹

The Protestant Reformation revitalized the use of the grammatical-historical method.

Paul Lee Tan argues that one of the great legacies of the Protestant Reformation was the bequeathing of the grammatical-historical approach to the heirs of the Reformation. He contends that “the gift of the Protestant reformers to the Christian church consists not only in an open Bible but also in the literal method of interpreting the Bible.”¹⁷⁰ Martin Luther and John Calvin are classic examples buttressing Tan’s argument. As a monk, Martin Luther (1483-1546) did

¹⁶⁷ Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, *JDT*, 41.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Paul Lee Tan, *Literal Interpretation of the Bible* (1967; reprint, Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1978) 54.

interpret allegorically. However, Luther later denounced allegorizing as empty speculation and called it “dirt,” “scum,” and “obsolete loose rags.”¹⁷¹

Bigalke quips that “the importance Luther gave to literal interpretation also meant an emphasis upon the original languages. Rejecting allegory, Luther emphasized *sensus literalis*.”¹⁷²

Besides Luther, John Calvin also maintained, “It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”¹⁷³

Bigalke provides a perceptive summary of the Reformers:

The Reformers abandoned the allegorical method of interpretation (characteristic of Catholicism) in all areas but eschatology. Amillennialism is the prophetic viewpoint of the Catholic Church, and it was also the prophetic viewpoint of the great Reformers. The reason that the Reformers retained the amillennialism of Catholicism was due to the time in which they lived. They did embrace a grammatical-historical interpretation of the Scripture in regards to soteriology and ecclesiology. Since eschatology was not a major issue, the Reformers did not have the opportunity to apply their hermeneutic consistently.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Ramm, *Biblical Interpretation*, 54. Paul R. Noble also shares a similar viewpoint. He contends that “the Reformers’ insistence that the Scriptures must be ‘understood literally’ was, in part, a rejection of the allegorists’ fanciful and speculative interpretations in favour of respecting the text’s plain, straightforward sense.” Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (New York: Brill, 2005), 310.

¹⁷² Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, 44. Tappert agrees with Bigalke’s assessment of Luther. He writes: “We shall not long preserve the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained.” Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *Luther’s Works*, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) 4:114-115. Also, it must be noted that the *sensus literalis* does not overlook figures of speech. Paul R. Noble observes: “Although the Reformers set the *sensus literalis* in opposition to allegory, it was not opposed to what Frei calls figural interpretation. On the contrary, the figural sense was seen as a natural extension of the literal, and in this way the Reformers were able to read the Old Testament as bearing witness to Christ.” Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (New York: Brill, 2005), 308.

¹⁷³ Tan, *Literal Interpretation of the Bible*, 54.

¹⁷⁴ Bigalke, *Biblical Interpretation*, *JDT*, 45.

Why the Historical-Grammatical Method is Preferable

In light of the above, the question still needs to be answered why the allegorical method is inadequate. K. Fullerton aptly captures the critical challenge the allegorical method poses. He writes, “When the historical sense of a passage is once abandoned, there is wanting any sound regulative principle to govern exegesis.”¹⁷⁵ Apart from the absence of a sound regulative principle, he noted that this “mystical [allegorical] method of exegesis, is an unscientific and arbitrary method, reduces the Bible to obscure enigmas, undermines the authority of all interpretation.”¹⁷⁶

To illustrate the arbitrariness of the allegorical method, two examples cited by Thomas Baurain will be cited:

An example of allegorical interpretation from early church history is seen in one of Augustine’s sermons on the gospel of John. John 2 describes Jesus’ first public miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Water was placed into six large stone water pots, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. The water was turned into wine by the Son of God. Augustine¹⁷⁷ interprets the six water pots to signify the six ages or six periods, each probably referring to a thousand years (hence, six thousand years).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ K. Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority: A Study in the History of the Doctrine of the Interpretation of Scripture*, 75, as cited by Ramm, *Biblical Interpretation*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 75, as cited by Ramm, *Biblical Interpretation*, 31. In his examination of the works of Johann August Ernesti, Sailhamer compares the Lutheran and Reformed approach to hermeneutics and draws some conclusions which underscore the importance of restraining the meaning of a text to the author’s words: “In Lutheran hermeneutics, the *sensus* of Scripture was located either in the *words* or in the *mysterium* pointed to by the *things*. Meaning (*sensus*) was thus often only indirectly connected to the *words* of Scripture. Though not intended to be so, in this system of interpretation, the *things* of Scripture enjoyed a certain degree of independence from the *words*. Only the literal sense (*sensus literalis*) was securely tied to the *words*. Consequently, in Lutheran approaches to the Bible, the *things* of Scripture could often become the means whereby, apart from the *words*, outside meaning was introduced into the text. This worked well in allowing a great deal of freedom for Christological interpretations of the OT, but there was a price to be paid for such freedom. Allowing Christological meaning to reside in the *things* pointed to by *words* opened a door so wide into Scripture that both orthodox scholars and Pietists could import their own doctrines and personal beliefs by truckloads into the text.” (Sailhamer, *The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation*, 201)

¹⁷⁷ St. Augustine, “Homilies on the Gospel of John,” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Phillip Schaff, ed., 1st series, vol. VII, 65.

¹⁷⁸ Baurain, “A Short Primer on Hermeneutics,” *JDT*, 46.

Another example of allegorizing from the medieval period of church history is taken from a commentary of the gospel of John by Rupert of Deutz (about the 12th century). Commenting on the 153 fish caught by the disciples (see John 21:11), Westcott summarizes Rupert's interpretation: "Rupert of Deutz. .. regards the three numbers [100, 50, 3] as the proportions of three different classes united in one faith. The 'hundred' are the married, who are the most numerous, the 'fifty' the widowed or continent who are less numerous, the 'three,' the least in number, are the virgins."¹⁷⁹ Examples could be multiplied, but the point is made. The interpretation obviously did not come from the text; rather it was read into the text. It did not result from carefully applied normal hermeneutics, but from inconsistent hermeneutics.¹⁸⁰

Language, Time, and the Grammatical-Historical Method

The interpretation of a text must consider language and time since the dynamic nature of language affects the meaning of a passage with time. This is even more crucial as we attempt to wrestle with texts dating from the first century AD. To interpret correctly, we need to understand what an author meant at the time of writing. Steiner is right in his remarks below:

Language is in perpetual change... Language... is the most salient model of Heraclitean flux. It alters at every moment in perceived time. The sum of linguistic events is not only increased but qualified by each new event... When we think about language, the object of our reflection alters in the process... [O]rdinary language is, literally at every moment, subject to mutation.¹⁸¹

According to Sailhamer, one person who sought to free the exegetical method from arbitrary interpretation by focusing on the text was Johann Augustus Ernesti. Sailhamer writes that Ernesti's "primary goal was to provide an exegetical approach to the NT that was identical to the newly developed philological approach taken in the study of all other ancient literature."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1950), 307.

¹⁸⁰ Baurain, "A Short Primer on Hermeneutics," *JDT*, 46.

¹⁸¹ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (3rd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 1998) 18.

¹⁸² Sailhamer, *The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation*, 201.

Ernesti, according to Sailhamer, argued that the only way New Testament exegesis could free itself from arbitrariness “was that a text could have no other meaning than its grammatical, or historical, sense.”¹⁸³ Sailhamer provides an insightful summary of the essence of Ernesti’s thesis.

That sense, which Ernesti usually called the *literal sense*, is located in individual words. The *sense* of a word is assigned to the word by “human arrangement and custom.” We would call it today “linguistic convention.” That *sense* consisted of a specific idea, or mental notion, of a *thing*. *Words* assign meaning to *things*. The fact that the *sense* of words is dependent on human custom means that its relationship to *things* is arbitrary. When in a certain language and at a certain time and place, a *sense* is affixed to a *thing* by a *word*, that *sense* becomes the necessary meaning of the *word*. It is for that reason that hermeneutics is grounded in historically conditioned situations and hence the *sense* of words must be investigated by means of a proper philological method. That means, the *sense* of the *words* should be discovered from the usage (*usus loquendi*) of the words at the time of the writing of the Biblical books.¹⁸⁴

In summary, the grammatical-historical method gleans meaning from the text at the literal level. The approach posits that the author behind a text determines the meaning of the text. Since the author is unavailable, the text determines the purpose of authorial intent, which consists of the words available to us rather than the reader.¹⁸⁵

Figurative Language and the Grammatical-Historical Method

The literal method also considers figurative language and literary genres and interprets them accordingly.¹⁸⁶ In the book “Invitation to Biblical Interpretation,” Köstenberger identified

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Vanhoozer laments the displacement of emphasis on the quest for meaning from the author and authorial intent below: “Indeed, the very meaning of “interpretation” has shifted; instead of being a knowledge claim concerning some discovery one has made about the meaning of the text, interpretation has become a way of referring to what the reader makes of the text. The new-fashioned interpreter recognizes no reality principle (the way it is), only the pleasure principle (the way I want it to be).” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, 38.

¹⁸⁶ For example, in his book *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, Robertson McQuilkin presents the following as the first of three guidelines for identifying figurative language: “1. If the statement would obviously be irrational, unreasonable, or absurd if taken literally, the presumption is that it is a figure of speech. ‘I am a door,’ and

the significant genres in scriptures as “historical narrative, poetry and wisdom, and prophecy in the Old Testament, as well as historical narrative, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic in the New Testament.”¹⁸⁷ Osbourne also notes that “the genre or type of literature in which a passage is found provides the “rules of the language game” (Wittgenstein), that is, the hermeneutical principles by which one understands it.”¹⁸⁸

The Book of Revelation is highly symbolic and contains passages where the *words* point to *things* and the *things* point to *other things*.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, there are clear clues and indicators of the meaning of most of the symbols in passages selected for examination in this dissertation.¹⁹⁰ Whether one considers Preterism, Idealism, Futurism, or Historicism, “elements of literal, symbolic, and figurative expressions are recognized in these four.”¹⁹¹ Two examples are the symbolic seven stars and seven golden candlesticks in the introductory vision of Chapter 1.

‘you are the salt’ are obviously irrational if taken literally. Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 170–171. What makes a literal understanding of such assertions “obviously irrational”? The fact that a person is not literally a door or salt. Persons are beings with natures that are different from the nature of a door or the nature of salt. But, assumptions about natures is a metaphysical assumption. The kind of being and the properties that inhere in that kind of being are questions of metaphysics. Thomas A. Howe, “Hermeneutics And Metaphysics,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* 03 (Fall 2004), 3.

¹⁸⁷ Andreas J Köstenberger, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academy 2018), 94.

¹⁸⁸ Grant T. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 26.

¹⁸⁹ As stated by Sailhamer: “*Words* point to (signify) *things*, but *things* also can point to (signify) other *things*. All *things* get pointed at by *words* (literal sense), but some *things* also point to other *things* (figurative sense).” Sailhamer, *The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation*, 197.

¹⁹⁰ This does not deny the difficult passages and symbols in the Book of Revelation.

¹⁹¹ Cory M. Marsh, “Kingdom Hermeneutics and The Apocalypse: A Promotion Of Consistent Literal Methodology,” *JMT*, 20 (Fall 2016), 85.

In the introduction to the book, John writes: “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; . . . 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” (Rev. 1:12, 16) Further down the chapter, the symbolic stars and the seven golden candlesticks are decoded as follows: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the *angels of the seven churches*: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the *seven churches*. (Rev. 1:20).

In another, in a highly symbolic language, John saw a great red dragon ready to devour the child of a pregnant “woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” (Rev. 12:1). The identity of the great dragon is given in the passage as follows: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” In summary, a passage must be allowed to explain the meaning of the symbols which act as pointers to things (reality).

The Place of Presuppositions in Research

This research does not detail the debate on the place of presuppositions in exegesis. Erickson correctly states that “all theological systems and all exegetical methodologies work

within some sort of philosophical perspective.”¹⁹² Similarly, Thomas Howe acknowledges the inevitability of assumptions and points out their right use below:

It is simply not possible or desirable to purge one’s theology or hermeneutics of the influence of philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular. Everyone comes to the text with presuppositions about the nature of reality. Indeed, every interpreter comes to the text with at least some rudimentary assumptions about the nature of God. It is not a question of purging one’s theology and hermeneutics of philosophy, whether it be Greek or Thomistic. Rather, it is a matter of understanding philosophy and metaphysics and consciously adopting that position that best fits with Divine Revelation, both general and special.¹⁹³

In harmony with the above, this dissertation posits and examines a fundamental soteriological assumption before proceeding to the following chapters. Can a person dismiss the believing/new birth/obedience/abiding/overcoming/discipleship as necessary conditions of salvation? If we are truly saved by faith *alone* or Christ *alone* without works or obedience; If a lifestyle of obedience is *not required* for final salvation; if believing/new birth/obedience/abiding/overcoming/discipleship is not a necessary condition for final salvation, then it implies that a person can be saved without this cluster of evidence. Such a position would further suggest that the presence or absence of these has no bearing on final salvation. In the case above, these series of evidence constitute no valid data for assessing assurance of salvation. This dissertation assumes that this secondary confirmatory evidence are necessary for salvation. Therefore, the presence or absence of this evidence can be evaluated for validating claims of assurance of salvation.

¹⁹² Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It? The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 251.

¹⁹³ Howe, *Hermeneutics and Metaphysics*, 8.

On the one hand, some argue that secondary confirmatory evidence is not vital to salvation. Faith alone in Christ is the only necessary ground for salvation. Luther wrote, "It is true that faith alone justifies, without works; but I am speaking about genuine faith, which, after it has justified, will not go to sleep but is active through love."¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Calvin wrote, "We are justified by not without works yet not through works. Faith alone justifies, but the faith which justifies is not alone."¹⁹⁵ Rainbow's evaluation questions the view held by these two magisterial reformers.

Nevertheless, Luther was aware that it was treading a dubious line logically to consider works a necessary consequence of faith without admitting this as a property of saving faith itself. Can a consequence be 'necessary' that is not implicit in the premise? And if good works are entailed by saving faith, is there any substantial difference between the formulas, 'the faith that saves is not alone', and 'one is justified by works and not by faith alone' (Jas. 2:24)? Luther could not solve it. "It is difficult and dangerous to teach that we are justified by faith without works and yet to require works at the same time." (LW 27.62)¹⁹⁶

The consistent view carrying this position to its logical conclusion is the GM's. This view argues that faith alone saves. Saving faith "occurs when one believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died and rose again to pay one's personal penalty for sin and the one who gives eternal life to all who trust Him and Him alone for it."¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Pierson writes: "You have what you take, do you not? It is a very simple thing to take what is given to you, and so to have it. That is, practically, *all there is in faith*. We may make faith obscure by talking too much about it, leading others to infer that there is in it some obscurity or mystery. Faith is very simple: it is

¹⁹⁴ LW. 27. 62.

¹⁹⁵ Calvin Inst 3.16.1 (798)

¹⁹⁶ Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 39.

¹⁹⁷ Hixon, J. B. *The Evangelical Crises No One Is Talking About: Getting the Gospel Wrong* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013), 91.

taking the eternal life that is offered to you in Christ."¹⁹⁸ The argument that evangelical obedience/works is only fruit of salvation and not necessary requirement for final salvation, justification only view of salvation, all lead to the conclusion below:

The sole condition for receiving eternal salvation from hell is faith (trust) in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died a substitutionary death on the cross for man's sin and rose from the dead. Repentance, rightly defined as a change of mind, is an integral part of this saving faith. No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one's sin, baptism, or submission to the Lordship of Christ, *may be added to, or considered as a part of, faith as a condition for receiving eternal.*"¹⁹⁹

This dissertation rejects the view above and argues that the series of confirmatory evidence are necessary conditions of salvation. As demonstrated in chapter two, the position taken here is a logical necessity. If this cluster of proof, as important as they, does not play any role in final salvation, not only does this position lend itself to antinomianism. On a more crucial note, it will be pointless to point to any of them for an evidential justification of assurance of salvation.

Rationale for the Selection of the Six Tests

Before proceeding to the textual examination of the six selected tests, it must be clarified that the six tests are not random and arbitrary. There are two reasons for the selection of the six tests in this dissertation. The first justification is textual and stems from the soteriological nature of the investigation. This rationale requires some explanation. Since this dissertation investigates epistemic justification for assessing assurance of salvation, the tests selected consider Johannine

¹⁹⁸ Arthur T. Pierson, *The Heart of the Gospel: Sermons on the Life-Changing Power of the Good News* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 46-47. Not my emphasis.

¹⁹⁹ Arthur L. Farstad, "An Introduction to Grace Evangelical Society and Its Journal," *JOTGES* 1 (Autumn 1988), 7-8.

themes that relate directly to the acquisition and retention of salvation.²⁰⁰ From this perspective, believing, abiding, following (discipleship), experience of the new birth, keeping the word and overcoming are all indispensable secondary confirmatory external evidence of salvation. The second rationale is epistemological. As the research examines and assesses claims of assurance of salvation, the themes selected must be verifiable experientially and observationally. In this light, it can be seen that all the tests selected are verifiable to a large extent.

Relationship Between the Six Tests

There is also the need to explain that although the six tests are distinct, they share a soteriological connection at the core. Stated simply, (1) believing, (2) an experience of the new birth, (3) discipleship or following Jesus, (4) keeping the word, (5) abiding in Christ and the Word and (6) overcoming are all aspects of the conditions to eternal life in the Johannine literature. In this connection, the six tests have a teleological relationship. These interrelationships lend itself to some repetitious thoughts which might be inevitable in light of the common biblical motif, soteriology. As an illustration, believing involves cognitive assent as well as obedience (keeping the word), overcoming necessitates believing, keeping the word, abiding, and continuing in the word (discipleship). Thus, while each test is distinct, it stands connected to other tests.

²⁰⁰ It must be noted that the external evidence that comes with these six tests are a direct “result of” or an “outflow from” a prior saving relationship with Christ and therefore gives justification for assessing assurance and not salvation itself. In other words, although the evidence does not cause salvation they are present where there is salvation.

Are The Six Tests Exhaustive?

Before ending this chapter, a word must be said on whether the six tests encapsulate all the possible epistemological validations of assurance in the Johannine literature. In other words, looking at the entire Johannine corpus, can it be said that the six selected tests are exhaustive? To answer this, it must be noted that a survey of the Johannine literature yields about sixteen related tests of assurance of salvation, namely, (1) The New Birth Test, (2) The Children of God – Devil Test, (3) The Believe Test, (4) Abiding Test, (5) The Fellowship Test, (6) The Keeping of the Word/Commandments Test, (7) The Doers of Good-Evil Test, (8) The Righteousness Test, (9) Discipleship/Following Test, (10) The Fruit Test, (11) The Love Test, (12) The Knowledge Test, (13) The Life Eternal Test, (14) The Sheep-Shepherd Test, (15) Overcoming Test, (16) The Father’s Keeping Test.

In light of the above, the six tests combine related themes and motifs. For example, the abiding test incorporates the fruit test. In addition, the keeping of the word test also integrates love and knowledge tests.²⁰¹ Even beyond the aforementioned tests, there are some tests which can be further explored. For instance, the Beatitudes Test, Resurrection Test, The Book of Life Test, and the Undefined Test in the book of Revelation.

²⁰¹ The love test encompasses other dimensions other than keeping of the commandments (1 John 5:1-5 and 2 John 1:6-9). Part of the ethical demonstration of love is love for one’s neighbor. A typical example is the love-hatred test in 1 John 2:9-11. In addition, John also provides the love of the world verses the love of the Father as another test in 1 John 2:15-17. Since love for God and neighbor is a summary of keeping the commandments of God, this dissertation subsumes love under keeping the commandments. The major reason for this is that love for God and one’s neighbor is demonstrated through obedience to the commandments of God.

Chapter Four Textual Survey

Chapter four is a textual examination of the evidence that justifies and validates assurance of salvation. Instead of answering the academic question “How can I be saved?”, it attempts to provide a pastoral answer to the practical, existential question “How can I know the assurance I have is epistemically justified?” Using the Johannine literature as the primary data, the chapter examines the Believing Test, New Birth Test, Keeping the Word Test, Overcoming Test, Discipleship Test, and the Abiding Test in sequential order. Regarding the structure, each test begins the textual investigation from the Gospel to the Epistles and, finally, the Book of Revelation.

Test One: The Believing Test

John writes towards the end of his Gospel that his writing intends to elicit belief in Jesus and which leads to life in His name (John 20:31). According to Schnackenburg, “the conclusion in Jn 20:30 is intended, above all, to point out clearly the purpose of the writing.”²⁰² Finding epistemic justification for assurance of salvation in John’s Gospel demands no particular starting point. However, since the purpose statement in John makes having “life” contingent on “believing,” this shall be the starting point of the quest for epistemic justification of assurance.²⁰³ In other words, a person who believes can have confidence.

²⁰² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 335. The Greek verb *hinā* introduces purpose. For a similar view, also see Edward W. Klink III, “John” in *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, General Editor Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 882; J. Ramsey Michaels, *NICNT: The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1022.

²⁰³ “The narrator plainly states the twofold purpose for which the Gospel was written. Both aspects emphasize that the expected response is “belief, the single word that can alone express the purpose of the entire Gospel, used nearly a hundred times.” Klink III, 882.

The research examines the following questions: (1) What does it mean to believe in John's Gospel?; (2) Are there distinctions of believing in John, such as true/false, genuine/counterfeit, adequate/inadequate? (3) What are the characteristics of true faith against which a person's profession of "believing" can be measured? Stated differently, how can a person know he believes? The research examines these epistemological questions.

Harris observes that the "noun "belief" (πίστις) and the verb "believe" (πιστεύω) are each used 243 times in the NT"²⁰⁴ while the "adjective *pistos* is found 67 times."²⁰⁵ In contrast to the verbal form, the noun does not "occur at all in the fourth Gospel."²⁰⁶ Regarding distribution, "neither word occurs in 2 John or 3 John, while Col, Philemon, 2 Peter and Revelation use only the noun."²⁰⁷ The verbal form *pisteuō* plays a crucial role in John's Gospel. Anderson notices, "Although the Synoptics (Matthew-Mark-Luke) use the verb believe sparingly, John uses it almost 100 times."²⁰⁸ Except chapters 15 and 18, *pisteuō* occurs in some form in the rest of the Gospel of John.

The word *pistis* appears in classical Greek literature, where it has a range of meanings, including "the trust that a man may place in men or the gods (Hesiod, *Works*, 372; Soph., *OT*, 1445), credibility (Soph., *OC*, 611), credit in business (Dem., 36, 57), guarantee (Aesch., *Frag.* 394), proof (Democ., 125), or something entrusted (IG 14, 2012 A 23)."²⁰⁹ In the NT,

²⁰⁴ Murray J. Harris, *John*, EGGNT, Gen. Eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015), 31.

²⁰⁵ Leon Morris, "Faith" in the *NBD*. Ed. J. D. Douglas (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1962), 366.

²⁰⁶ *NIDNTTE*, Vol. 3. Revised Editor Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 769.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ David R. Anderson, "The Nature of Faith," *CTSJ* 5 (Sep 1999), 2.

²⁰⁹ *NIDNTTE*, Vol. 1., 594.

“depending on the context, πιστεύω can mean *consider true, obey or trust*”²¹⁰ as well as giving “credence to a message and/ or its bearer.”²¹¹

Since the message of Jesus elicits a human response, believing is the “divinely willed response” to the Gospel.²¹² In addition, since the one who believes receives life (Jn 20:31), “faith and life are intimately connected”²¹³ in John’s Gospel. In summary, *pistis* and *pisteuō* “represent the appropriate human relationship to God and Christ, and they point to the essence of Christianity and its most distinctive feature in comparison with Greek and Jewish thought.”²¹⁴

The Benefits of Believing

Believing in Jesus comes with loads of benefits. Believing (1) comes with power/right to become Sons of God (1:12) and (2) leads to everlasting life.²¹⁵ The one who believes (3) will not be condemned;²¹⁶ (4) shall never thirst (6:35); (5) will be raised on the last day (6:40); (6) will have rivers of living water flowing out of him (7:38); (7) will live even though dead (11:25); (8) will never die (11:26); (9) will see the glory of God (11:40), (10); will become children of light (12:36); (11) should not abide in darkness (12:46); (12) shall do the works of Jesus (14:12); (13)

²¹⁰ EDNT, Vol. 3. Ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 92.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² John F. McHugh, *ICC: John 1-4*. Eds. G. I. Davies and C. M. Tuckett (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), 26.

²¹³ *NIDNTTE*, Vol. 1., 603

²¹⁴ Harris, *John*, 31.

²¹⁵ John 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47.

²¹⁶ John 3:18; 5:24.

will have life through the name of Jesus (20:31). In summary, “believing” provides an overarching motif that summarizes eternal life and its benefits in John’s gospel.

On the other hand, not “believing” has dire consequences. Anyone who refuses to believe in Jesus will perish (3:15, 16); is already condemned (3:18); shall not see life (3:36) and lives under the wrath of God (3:36). Further, in chapter 8, Jesus declared to the Jews, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (8:24). In summary, unbelief is tantamount to a rejection of salvation.

The Object of Believing

The purpose statement indicates that John wrote his gospel to elicit a belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Jn 20:31). To this end, John the Baptist was sent to bear witness to Jesus as the light so that (*hinā*) "all through him might believe" (John 1:7). *Hinā*, introduces a purpose clause. Teleologically, in harmony with the purpose statement, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (9:35; 11:27; 12:11), a belief which leads to eternal life through Jesus' name (John 20:31), was the object of John's ministry. This belief involves believing (1) in His name (1:12; 2:23)²¹⁷ and (2) in Him.²¹⁸ The phrase "believe me" also appears in John²¹⁹ where Jesus makes a direct appeal to His hearers for a response to his identity and word. Additionally, the words of Jesus (2:22; 4:50) and his works (10:38) are objects of believing.

²¹⁷ “The ‘name’, for men of antiquity, was a way of summing up the whole personality. It stood for all that the man was. Believing on the name of Christ, then, means believing in all that he is essentially in himself.” “Faith” in the *NBD*, 367.

²¹⁸ John 2:11; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 40, 47; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45, 48; 12:37, 42, 44; 17:20.

²¹⁹ John 4:21; 11:25, 26; 14:10, 12; 16:9.

Since Jesus came to reveal the Father, it stands to reason that to believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father (12:44; 14:1), the one who sent him. As Klink observes, "everything Jesus has said and done is as the representative of the Father, whom Jesus describes in the theologically robust language as "the one who sent me."²²⁰ Thus, "to believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father."²²¹ In summary, "the true object of the Christian's faith is God, and the mode of their faith in Christ (and the empowerment of that same faith is the Spirit)."²²²

Dimensions of Believing

pisteuō + hotī

Believing has many dimensions in the Johannine literature. One aspect John emphasizes is pisteuō + hotī. This verbal form highlights facts, "indicating that faith is concerned with facts."²²³ Moreover, these hotī "clauses express the content of faith in Christ"²²⁴ or "the content of what is believed (8:24; 11:27, 42; 13:19; 14:10; 16:30;17:21; 20:31)."²²⁵ In a nutshell, it focuses on the acknowledgment and acceptance of facts.

Several passages demonstrate that acknowledging facts is a significant aspect of believing in John. In his dialogue with the Jews in John 8, Jesus stated clearly, "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24), showing that accepting or acknowledging

²²⁰ Klink III, *John*, 562.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Morris, "Faith" in *NBD*, 367.

²²⁴ *EDNT*, 93.

²²⁵ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 304.

facts about Jesus, though not enough, is a necessary component of belief in the Gospel.²²⁶ In another instance, Martha admitted that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of God” (John 11:27).²²⁷

John 20:31 seems to present both a logical and temporal sequence. The first step is an intellectual acceptance of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. Consequently, the intellectual acknowledgment of facts about Jesus leads to an organic co-participation, that is, union with him, leading to eternal life. Hence, while intellectual assent is not enough, it is the basis of true belief. The observation above harmonizes with Michael's remarks:

The last clause, "and that believing you might have life in his name" (v. 31b), goes to the very heart of this Gospel's theology (for example, "so that everyone who believes might have eternal life in him," 3:15; "so that everyone who believes in him might not be lost but have eternal life," 3:16; "whoever believes has eternal life," 6:47) - not to mention that of 1 John ("These things I wrote to you so that you might know that you have life eternal, you who believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 Jn 5:13)).²²⁸

Although facts are crucial, a parallel passage in the epistle of James confirms the inadequacy of intellectual assent. James 2:19 indicates that factual knowledge of God, though important is not enough. The link between John's Gospel and James 2:19 is the occurrence of the phrase “*pisteuō + hotī*.”²²⁹ James writes, “You believe that (*hotī*) there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” McCartney calls this “bare knowledge of theological

²²⁶ Lenski notes that coming to faith (ingressive aorist) is an invitation to “come to accept, trust, and cling to the divine deliverer.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 614.

²²⁷ Jesus prayed that the Jews present may believe the fact that the Father had sent him (John 11:42). Further, the disciples believed the fact that (1) Jesus “came out from God” (John 16:27, 30) and (2) the Father sent Jesus (John 17:8). In his prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed for unity for the followers that the world may believe the fact that the father sent the Son (John 17:21). Outside the Gospel of John, *pisteuō + hotī* describes the facts about Jesus' ability to heal (Matt. 9:28), the efficacy of prayer (Mark 11:23-24), Saul's conversion (Acts 9:26), the new life (Rom. 6:8), the resurrection 1 Th. 4:14) and facts about Jesus' identity (1 John 5:1, 5).

²²⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1023.

²²⁹ See John 8:24; 10:26; 11:15, 27, 42; 12:39; 14:10; 16:27, 30; 17:8, 21; 20:31.

truth”²³⁰ and argues that “believing that there is one God (intellectual acknowledgment) is different from believing in (εἰς, eis, into) the God who is one.”²³¹ Demons have factual knowledge about God. However, their accurate knowledge does not lead to any commitment²³² or organic relationship with Him through Jesus.²³³ In essence, James establishes that verbal assent or cognitive ability alone is insufficient since it lacks active submission shown through obedience.²³⁴

In summary, although it is inadequate, *pisteuō + hotī* demonstrates that recognizing facts is an essential dimension of believing. Beyond intellectual consent or acknowledgment of facts, a person must “receive him” (John 1:12) to “have life through his name.” (John 20:31). Beyond consent, “to believe is to have the true confidence of the heart, kindled by the Word,”²³⁵ and this “implies both belief in a fact and a trust resultant from that belief.”²³⁶

²³⁰ Dan G. McCartney, *James* in BECNT. Ed. Robert W. Yarbrough Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2009), 160-161.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Boice doubts the possibility of faith without commitment to Christ. He writes Is “faith” minus commitment a true biblical faith? We remember that the apostle James goes so far as to insist ... that a faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). Such “faith” is useless (v. 20), worth nothing (v. 16). It is a claim to faith only (v. 14), not genuine faith, ... no different from the assent of the demons who “believe ... and shudder” (Jas 2:19).” James Montgomery Boice, *Christ’s Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 17.

²³³ At one time in the ministry of Jesus, an unclean spirit speaking through a man confessed, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24) Nonetheless, the knowledge did not lead to submission to God.

²³⁴ James stands in the same train of thought with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus demonstrated in a parable that it is doing that counts other saying (Matt. 21:28-32). James shows remarkable consistency with Paul who argues that although no one shall be justified by the deeds of the law (Gal. 2:16), the faith that saves is the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6). Thus, Paul could also write that “not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” (Rom. 2:13)

²³⁵ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 257.

²³⁶ McHugh, *ICC: John 1-4*, 237.

pisteuō + eis

The verb *pisteuō* with the proper preposition *eis* is “unique to Christianity.”²³⁷ The form *pisteuō* + *eis* followed by the accusative occurs 45 times in the NT, out of which 36 appear in John’s Gospel,²³⁸ marking this prepositional phrase as one of John’s favorite constructions. As to the origin of this phrase, C. H. Dodd writes that so far as he has been able to discover, there is no parallel to πιστεύειν εἰς in profane Greek either.²³⁹ Hawthorne submits that “this expression can be said to be original with the New Testament writers, and an important construction for their message.”²⁴⁰ Further, he underscores the uniqueness of this expression by noting that “there is no similar example in the LXX.”²⁴¹

Granted that this is predominantly a Johannine expression²⁴², how can we understand it? Is there a shade of meaning in this prepositional phrase that throws more light on the meaning of *pisteuō*? According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, this phrase means to believe ‘into.’²⁴³ Also in

²³⁷ Anderson, “The Nature of Faith,” *CTSJ*, 16. Also see Archbishop J. H. Bernard, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T, 1985), 17.

²³⁸ These are the occurrences in the Gospel of John: (1:12; 2:11, 23; 3:16, 18 [2x], 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:35, 36; 10:42; 11:25, 26, 45, 48; 12:11, 36, 37, 42, 44 [3x], 46; 14:1, 12; 16:9; 17:20).

²³⁹ Gerald F. Hawthorne, “The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” *BSAC* 118 (Apr 1959), 119.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* Guthrie suggests that this usage “probably originated in Christian circles to differentiate between mere belief and personal trust. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 581.

²⁴² Regarding the predominance of the expression in John’s gospel, Hawthorne writes: “The astonishing thing, however, is that this new and original construction is monopolized by the Fourth Evangelist. Out of the 45 New Testament examples, John accounts for 36 of them. He seems to be struggling with a new concept of or a new dimension of faith. That he intends the reader to distinguish it from πιστεύειν with the dative can be deduced clearly from John 14:11–12. There, Jesus is quoted as saying, “Believe [119] me (πιστεύειν μοι), [that is, “believe what I have to say when I assert that I am in the Father.”] But He says in the next sentence, “The one who believes in me (πιστεύειν ἐμέ) will do the works which I am doing and greater.” What all, then, is packed into this new expression? Hawthorne, *Faith in the Fourth Gospel*, *BSAC*, 119.

²⁴³ Morris, “Faith” in *NBD*, 367. Further, the dictionary continues, “It denotes a faith, which, so to speak, takes a man out of himself, and puts him into Christ.” *Ibid.* For a similar view, Bill Bennett also argues, “The

his Exegetical Guide to the New Testament, Harris maintains that the words “depicts the total committal of one’s total self to the person of Christ as Messiah and Lord, ”²⁴⁴ a view Bruner too shares.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, Harris writes, “For John, belief involves not only recognition and acceptance of the truth but also adherence and allegiance to Jesus as the truth (14:6).”²⁴⁶ “To believe in Jesus,”²⁴⁷ according to Harris, then, “is to come to him (5:40; 6:35, 37, 44-45, 65; 7:37), to receive him (1:12), to drink the water he offers (4:13-14), to follow him (8:12) and to love him (14:5, 21, 23; 16:27).”²⁴⁸

The object of *pisteuō + eis*

An observation of the data shows that *pisteuō eis* never has “a human object of faith.”

The objects of *pisteuō + eis* are (1) His name (1:12; 2:23); (2) him²⁴⁹; (3) the Son (3:36); (4) me (Jesus)²⁵⁰; (5) the Son of God (9:35); (6) Jesus (12:11); (7) the light (12:36); (8) God (14:1).²⁵¹

Greatest Heresy Plaguing Southern Baptists Today,” *Faith and Mission*, 17 (Spring 2000), 33. (32-39). Bennett further examines John 3:15 (*pisteuo + ev*), John 3:16 (*pisteuo + eis*) and Acts 16:31 (*pisteuo + epi*) and comes to the following conclusion, “Thus we can see that saving faith means to believe *in*, to believe *into* (union), to rest or rely *upon*, which add up to the total surrender and personal trust which result in a changed life. To say that John 3:15, John 3:16, and Acts 16:31—classic texts on how to be saved—teach that only intellectual faith is necessary for salvation is to deny the clear meaning of the Greek text.” *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁴⁴ Harris, *John*, 32.

²⁴⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012).

²⁴⁶ Harris, *John*, 32.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁴⁹ John 2:11; 3:16, 18(2x); 4:39; 6:26; 6:40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:36; 10:42; 11:45, 48; 12:37, 42; 16:9.

²⁵⁰ John 6:35; 11:25, 36; 12:44, 46; 14:12.

²⁵¹ Harris, *John*, 31.

Harris observes that “it is in Christ that God meets the individual in salvation so that there are no two competing objects of human faith.”²⁵²

Synonymous Expressions of *pisteuō + eis* in John

John writes in chapter one that “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). He parallels “as many as received him” and “those who believe in His name.” In this regard, “to accept the Logos is to believe and to trust in its name.”²⁵³ This acceptance contrasts the previous verse, where his own rejected him. With the rejection of Israel, “ultimately, “his own” would be defined as those who heed his message (10:3–4), those who were truly in covenant relationship with him.”²⁵⁴

Secondly, believing in his name implies giving “allegiance to Him because He is what His name (or names) imply that He is.”²⁵⁵ This phrase thus entails accepting that Jesus “bears the divine name.”²⁵⁶ Here John does not “stress head-type” of believing.²⁵⁷ The belief expressed in John 1:12 “yields allegiance to the Word and complete trust in the Word, as appropriate for

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ John F. McHugh, and Graham Stanton. *John 1-4 (ICC): A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), 46. Costa links the reception of “his name” also to the granting of the right to become God’s child. Those who receive Jesus, are those who believe in his name, and have “the right” to “become children of God.” It is to them that Jesus gives the right to be children of God. Tony Costa, “The Use Of Πιστεύω In The Gospel Of John: Some Considerations On Meaning And Issues Of Consistency And Ambiguity,” *CONSPECTUS* 32:1 (Oct 2021), 95. Further Costa writes “The concept of believing in his name, reflects the idea of “name” as representative of the person, character, reputation, and authority. The idea of “name” functions as a substitute for the person.” Ibid., 95.

²⁵⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes* (Baker Academic, 2010), 399.

²⁵⁵ R. V. G. Tasker, *TNTC: The Gospel According to St. John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 47.

²⁵⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *BECNT: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 38.

²⁵⁷ Gerald L. Borchert, *NAC: John 1-11* (Broadman & Holman, 2002), 116.

(small) children.”²⁵⁸ Likewise, it implies “total commitment to the one who is trusted.”²⁵⁹

Vincent encapsulates the essence of *pisteuō eis*:

To believe *in* or believe *on*, is more than mere acceptance of a statement. It is so to accept a statement or a person as to rest upon them, to trust them practically; to draw upon and avail one’s self of all that is offered to him in them. Hence to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely to believe the facts of His historic life or of His saving energy as facts, but to accept Him as Saviour, Teacher, Sympathizer, Judge; to rest the soul upon Him for present and future salvation, and to accept and adopt His precepts and example as binding upon the life.”²⁶⁰

Continuity of Believing

The tenses of *pisteuō* in John underline another vital aspect of ‘believing.’ Whereas the “aorist tense points to a single act in past time and signifies the determinative character of faith,”²⁶¹ the “present tense has the idea of continuity.”²⁶² The present tense indicates that rather than being a passing phase, faith “is a continuing attitude.”²⁶³ In general, “the perfect tense combines both ideas, which speaks of a present faith that is continuous with a past act of belief. The man who believes enters a permanent state.”²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Klink III, *John*, 105. For a similar position, see Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

²⁵⁹ Lidija Novakovic, *John 1-10, A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 11. Philips stresses in addition, “Receiving him and believing on his name means bending the knee and opening your heart to be ruled by him. . . We do not receive him unless we are willing to yield to his commands.” Richard D. Phillips, *John Volume 1: Chapters 1-10, REC* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 47.

²⁶⁰ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 49-50.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Morris, “Faith” in *NBD* 367. John 1:12-13 illustrates the impact of tenses on the meaning of Greek verbs, in this case, *pisteuō*.

Table 1: Tenses in John 1:1

Verb	Tense	Duration	Meaning
ἔλαβον	aorist active indicative	action completed in the past	received him
πιστεύουσιν	present active participle	action that continues	continue to believe
ἐγεννήθησαν	aorist passive indicative	action completed in the past	born

From Table 1, John equates “received” with “to believe”²⁶⁵ since “those that “received him” are those “who believe in his name.”²⁶⁶ Second, a look at the three verbs above further indicates that those who “believe”(1:12) are those who “received Him”(1:12) and were “born by God” (1:13). Morris is thus right that the articulated present participle describes “those to whom the right of childhood has been given.”²⁶⁷

Next, while “received” and “born” have a sense of completion in the past, “to believe” is not a one-time action. It is a continuous action. “The imperfective aspect of the present participle portrays believing as an unfolding process, without regard to beginning or end.”²⁶⁸ Thus, “As many as did accept him”²⁶⁹ means “as many as continue to embrace him by a living faith in his name.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Klink III, *John*, 104.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 105.

²⁶⁷ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 62.

²⁶⁸ Novakovic, *John 1-10*, 11.

²⁶⁹ William Hendriksen, *NTC: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2004), 81.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The present active participle is also John's favorite way of portraying saving faith in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Whereas the present, future, and perfect active indicatives each occur once in the dialogue (3:12, 18), the present active participle occurs five times.²⁷¹ In summary, the nature of genuine or right belief in John's Gospel is continuous. Jesus himself called people to believe on many occasions. However, even among initial disciples, some did not continue believing.²⁷² These two polarities exist in the Johannine literature. As Lenski notes, "Believers and non-believers are divided by one thing, continuous believing marking the one man, continuous non-believing the other. The whole world is divided into these two."²⁷³

The Case of John 2:23-24

One of the passages in John with diverse interpretations reads, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men" (John 2:23-24). The same word, *pisteuō*, is interpreted as "believed" in v. 23 and "commit" in v. 24. In other words, if *pisteuō + eis* represents real genuine faith in John, what accounts for the refusal of Jesus to believe in the belief of his hearers?

²⁷¹ John 3:15, 16, 18(2x), 36. Further confirmation of saving faith as a continuous action portrayed by the present active participle is found in John 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 7:38; 8:40; 11:25, 26; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 17:20; 20:31

²⁷² Example John 6:64; 8:45, 46.

²⁷³ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 267.

Scholars and commentators have offered several interpretations. There is the position that their faith was "mere intellectual assent,"²⁷⁴ spurious,²⁷⁵ while for Barrett, they had an "appearance of faith."²⁷⁶ Against these views, Debbie Hunn dismisses the "spurious faith" interpretation and argues that "certainly Jesus could not be fooled by appearance."²⁷⁷ She further contends that "the text does not say that people appeared to believe or that they spoke well-intentioned words." On the contrary, the text says, "that they believed in his name."²⁷⁸

Hunn cites Origen,²⁷⁹ Tasker²⁸⁰, Westcott, and Abbot²⁸¹ for the view that the people's faith in John 2:23-24 was genuine but insufficient to save them. She also offers a rebuttal to this view by reasoning that the text does not indicate the inadequacy of faith in Christ.²⁸² Hunn proposes that Jesus did not commit because he knew that none of those believers in 2:23 "would rally to him when the Jews would try to seize him, stone him, or crucify him."²⁸³ Hunn's proposal

²⁷⁴ John MacArthur, *MNTC: John 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2006), 95.

²⁷⁵ Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 184.

²⁷⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 202.

²⁷⁷ Debbie Hunn, "The Believers Jesus Doubted: John 2:23–25," *TRINJ*, 1 (Spring 2004), 15-16.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John: Books 1–10: Books 13–32* (trans. Ronald E. Heine; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 324–25.

²⁸⁰ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 66. Tasker continues that Jesus "regarded all belief in Him as superficial which does not have as its most essential elements the consciousness of the need for forgiveness and the conviction that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness." *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary: A Comparison of the Words of the Fourth Gospel With Those of the Three* (London: A. and C. Black, 1905), 32–37; Brooke Foss Westcott and Arthur Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 98.

²⁸² Hunn, The Believers Jesus Doubted, *TRINJ*, 17.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24.

is less convincing because there is no indication that Jesus expected any of his followers to protect or rescue him from physical assault or the crucifixion.

In light of the impact of tenses on the meaning of *pisteuō*, here is a modest proposal for the resolution of this text. Jesus did not commit to them because he knew their faith would not last. The belief was neither spurious nor insincere but ephemeral. The aorist active indicative, *episteusan*, indicates an action referring to the past.²⁸⁴ For example, after hearing Jesus's sermon on the light of the World, John records that "many *believed* (aorist active indicative) on him" (John 8:30). The plural aorist active indicative describing their belief as an action in the past stands in contrast to Jesus' challenge to them to "continue" or "remain" in his word (John 8:31). In light of this, the best solution to the interpretation lies in seeing a distinction between one-time expression of belief in Jesus as against continuing in that belief. Maybe Jesus did not commit to or believe in them because he knew they would not continue in their faith.

Believing and the Word

John's Gospel shows that believing is inextricably related to the words of Jesus. During the conversation between Jesus and the Jews at the Pool of Bethesda, he declared that the hearing and believing of His word leads to everlasting life (John 5:24). As the means of bringing life those he wants²⁸⁵ the "hearing and the believing go together."²⁸⁶ Concerning the relationship between the Word and believing, Lenski's comments are insightful:

The Word communicated by the apostles is the means for producing faith and making believers. . . . Word and faith are correlative; the one intends to produce the other, and

²⁸⁴ More passages with this particular construction John 2:11; 4:39, 50, 53; 7:31.

²⁸⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 315.

²⁸⁶ Lenski, 389. Later John writes that Jesus "quickens whom he wills" meaning that he gives life eternal to everyone that hears and believes his Word. Lenski, 388.

the other has no true basis but the one. Apart from the Word there is no church, because there is no faith apart from the Word; and the church is constituted out of those alone who have faith. The Word is the vital means and root of faith.²⁸⁷

Believing and Obedience

The encounter between Jesus and the nobleman in Capernaum (John 4:46-54) illustrates the relationship between believing the Word of Jesus and obedience. When Jesus commanded him to go away, without any hesitation and doubt, he “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way” (John 4:50). In this insightful episode, “the man whose faith had been resting completely upon miracles now advances to a higher stage: he believed the Word which Jesus had spoken. Accepted the Word though he saw no deed.”²⁸⁸

By believing that what Jesus said would happen,²⁸⁹ he acted on the Word by departing. The nobleman’s story demonstrates that “faith becomes a way of life when it is active in a life of prayer and obedience.”²⁹⁰ Since true faith obeys the Word, John equates unbelief to disobedience (Jn 3:36).

Conclusion of Test One

After examining the Gospel of John, the object of “believing” that secures salvation for now into eternity is Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God (John 20:30). This involves believing

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 1155.

²⁸⁸ Hendriksen, *NTC: John*, 82.

²⁸⁹ D. Moody Smith Jr. *ANTC: John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 126.

²⁹⁰ Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 79. See also Klink III, *John*, 262.

(1) in His name (1:12; 2:23) and (2) in Him²⁹¹. The phrase “believe me” also appears in John²⁹² where Jesus makes a direct appeal to His hearers for a response to his identity and word.

To believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is to (1) Receive him (1:12); (2) To come to him²⁹³; (3) Believe in his words (2:22; 4:50); (4) Believe his works (10:38); (5) Believe in the Father (14:1) He came to reveal (6) to obey him by acting on his word (4:50). Beyond intellectual assent, true faith involves trusting and obeying him ; giving credence to his word ; subordinating oneself to him as Lord ; lifelong union with Him ; total commitment to him and allegiance to him as the truth . The one who believes must continue believing in Jesu in a lifelong journey of total commitment.

Test Two: The New Birth Test

The Gospel of John establishes a link between “eternal life” and “believing” in the prologue, where John writes that the source of life is the Word (1:4). The proposition *ev* points to the very location of this life.²⁹⁴ Since the Word is the exclusive source²⁹⁵, only the Word can impart life. In the purpose statement in the epilogue of the Gospel (John 20:30-31), the means of receiving such “life” is believing in the name of Jesus.²⁹⁶ In summary, then, salvation in John consists of receiving the life of Jesus through faith in him” (Jn 3:15-16).

²⁹¹ John 2:11; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 40, 47; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45, 48; 12:37, 42, 44; 17:20.

²⁹² John 4:21; 11:25, 26; 14:10, 12; 16:9.

²⁹³ John 5:40; 6:35, 37, 44-45, 65; 7:37.

²⁹⁴ Novakovic, *John 1-10*, 5.

²⁹⁵ For instance, John 5:39-40 says, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

²⁹⁶ As established previously, this could be stated as believing “in his name,” “in him,” etc.

Similarly, John 1:12-13 shows a relationship between receiving, believing, and new birth. According to the text, believing/receiving leads to the granting of “the right to become children of God” (v. 12). Just as in the physical realm having a child requires a birthing process, the process of becoming a child of God requires spiritual birthing (v.13). Deventer notices that v.12 creates the connection between language of belief and language of birth.”²⁹⁷ In summary, believing connects to spiritual birthing or the new birth.

New Birth-Believing Equivalence

John describes salvation from multiple interrelated perspectives. Just as ‘believing’ leads to eternal life (Jn 3:15, 16), the ‘new birth’ leads to eternal life (Jn 3:3, 5), thus, making ‘believing’ equivalent to the ‘new birth.’ This assumption could be correct if seeing the kingdom (Jn 3:5) and entering the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5) are equivalent to eternal life or salvation. To verify the assumption above necessitates examining what it means to “see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3) and “enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). Towards this examination, we turn to the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 which reveals “the new birth as the gateway to the kingdom of God.”²⁹⁸

Meaning of Kingdom of God In The Context of John 3

The NT has sixty-five references to the ‘kingdom of God.’ Interestingly, Matthew alone shows all the occurrences of the “kingdom of heaven”(32x). Goldsworthy argues that “the terms

²⁹⁷ Cornelia van Deventer, “Spiritual Birth, Living Water, And New Creation: Mapping Life-Giving Metaphors In The Fourth Gospel,” *CONSPECTUS*, 32 (Oct 2021), 145-146.

²⁹⁸ Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 68.

are demonstrably interchangeable” and “at its simplest, the kingdom of God refers to God ruling.”²⁹⁹ Wellum writes agreeably, “Basically, the kingdom of God refers to God’s *kingly rule*, which is especially tied to God’s *saving reign*. It does *not* primarily refer to a certain geographical location. Rather the phrase tells us more about *God* (the fact that he reigns) than anything else.”³⁰⁰ While the meaning above applies in some contexts, John 3 will provide the context for assessing the meaning of the “kingdom of God.”

John employs the phrase “kingdom of God” twice in the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5). In this particular context, the focus of the conversation is about eternal life and the pathway to it. At the initial encounter, the new birth and the means of entering/seeing the kingdom of God take center stage. As the dialogue progresses, this transitions into believing/eternal life. The fact that out of the eighteen occurrences, John uses *gennaō* eight times³⁰¹ as the means of entering into the kingdom of God in this context underscores the significance of the birthing metaphor in the narrative. Thus, in the first part of the conversation, the new birth is presented as the gateway to entering the kingdom of God.

Like *gennaō*, *pisteuō* equally occurs eight times in the second half of the conversation and further after the chapter.³⁰² Instead of condemnation (3:18) and perishing (3:15, 16), believers will possess eternal life (3:15, 16, 36). Comparing the two halves of the conversation, the birth/kingdom of God parallels belief/eternal life. Stated differently, just as believing leads to eternal life, the new birth leads to entrance into the kingdom of God. In summary, whereas believing parallels the new birth, eternal life also parallels the kingdom of God.

²⁹⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, “The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid,” *SBJT* 1 (Spring 2008), 7.

³⁰⁰ Stephen J. Wellum, “Reflecting on the Kingdom of God,” *SBJT* 1 (Spring 2008), 2.

³⁰¹ John 3:3, 4(2x), 5, 6 (2x), 7, 8.

³⁰² John 3:12 [2x], 15, 16, 18 [3x], 36.

Outside John's Gospel, Matthew 19:16-24 records a story that supports the equivalent use of the "kingdom of God" and "eternal life." To the inquiry, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16), Jesus told his disciples after the inquirer had left, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23) "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:24). Köstenberger recognizes that "the expressions "kingdom of God" and "eternal life" are essentially equivalent is suggested by their parallel use in Matt. 19:16, 24 pars."³⁰³ This usage in Matthew confirms the conclusion that, at least, there is one additional context where the kingdom of God parallels eternal life.

Seeing and Entering the Kingdom of God

If the Kingdom of God is correspondent to eternal life, there is the need to determine the meaning of the aorist active infinitives ἰδεῖν (v. 3) and εἰσελθεῖν (v. 5). What does it mean "to see" or "to enter" the kingdom of God? Granted that the "kingdom of God" is equivalent to "eternal life," in the context of John 3, "to see" the kingdom of God seems to be identical to "have eternal life." John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him," seems to support this conclusion. In the verse above, "to have everlasting life" parallels "to see life."

In Matthew, to have eternal life is parallel to entering the narrow way/gate (Matt. 7:13) and entering into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23). Therefore, as noted earlier, to enter into life (Matt. 19:17) is to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:23, 24).³⁰⁴ Just as John presents the

³⁰³ Köstenberger, *John*, 123.

³⁰⁴ In addition to Matthew, another passage where "seeing" is equivalent to "entering" is Numbers. For their unbelief, God told the children of Israel that "they certainly shall not see (*horaō*) the land" (Num 12:23). Later

new birth, Matthew likewise makes admission into the kingdom of God contingent. To enter the kingdom of heaven requires having a righteousness beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), doing the will of God (Matt. 7:21), and being converted like a child (Matt. 18:3). Without getting into the similarities and dissimilarities of the conditions, at least, this establishes that there are some requirements for entrance into the kingdom of God.

In summary, “to see” and “to enter” are roughly synonymous.³⁰⁵ Both phrases indicate entrance into the kingdom of God or possession of everlasting life “to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life”³⁰⁶ and “only those who are born again may enter the kingdom of God.”³⁰⁷ In this sense, whoever believes in Christ receives his life through the agency of the Spirit (new birth) and already lives in the kingdom.

The Necessity of the New Birth

After setting forth the new birth as “a condition for entering the kingdom of God,”³⁰⁸ John uses different words to express the necessity of the new birth. *Eáv* occurs fifteen times in the Gospel of John³⁰⁹ and three times in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, where “it introduces the protasis of a third-class condition.”³¹⁰ Elsewhere John states that no one comes

on in the chapter, God made an exception. “Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter (*eiserchomai*) the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. (Num. 14:30).

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 122.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ John F. Walvoord, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” *BSAC* 495 (Jul 1967), 200.

³⁰⁸ Robert V. McCabe, “Born Of Water And The Spirit” *DBSJ* 1 (Fall 1999), 86.

³⁰⁹ 3:2, 3, 5, 27; 4:48; 5:19; 6:44, 53, 65; 7:51; 12:24; 13:8; 15:4, 6; 20:25.

³¹⁰ Novakovic, *John 1-10*, 77. Nicodemus acknowledges that no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Restating this, the only condition that makes the miracles of Jesus possible is the

to Jesus except the Father draws him (6:44) or except the Father gives the person to Jesus (6:65); no one has life except those who eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood (6:53); a branch cannot bear fruit except it abides in the vine (15:4); except corn of wheat cannot germinate and bear fruit except it falls to the ground (12:24). John uses the same subjunctive mood to state the necessary prerequisite(s) for seeing/entering the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). By using the subjunctive mood, John places the necessity of the new birth for entering the kingdom beyond dispute.

In addition to *èav mē*, John's use of the word *dei* reinforces the necessity of the new birth (3:3, 5). *Dei* occurs 101 times in the NT. In ten passages, John uses the word to underscore the necessity of Jesus' thoroughfare through Samaria (4:4), dispute the longstanding belief of the necessity of true worship in Jerusalem (4:20) and establish the necessity of worshipping in truth and Spirit (4:24). The word also stresses the necessity of Jesus' work in the day (9:4); bringing all his sheep into one-fold (10:16); and the resurrection (20:9). Further, in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, the word appears in 3:14 to emphasize the necessity of the death of Jesus.³¹¹

The Source of the New Birth

In John's thinking, since origin determines nature,³¹² he differentiates between physical and spiritual births by contrasting their sources. Negatively stated, unlike the physical, the source of spiritual birth is not "of blood," nor "of the will of the flesh," nor "of the will of man"

presence of God with Him. Stated negatively, the signs or miracles of Jesus could not be possible without God's presence with him. The presence of God then becomes an inevitable and necessary condition.

³¹¹ This necessity is repeated in John 12:34; 3:30.

³¹² John F. McHugh, *ICC: John 1-4*, 229.

(1:13). Later in the dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus reiterated the absolute discontinuity between physical and spiritual origins by asserting that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:6). All the three sources of possible physical birth, (1) blood, (2) will of the flesh and (3) the will of man, cannot generate spiritual birth.

Just as John negates three sources of physical birth, he presents spiritual birth from three interrelated sources. First, he presents God, who has “life in himself” (5:26), as the source of Life. Spiritual birth is, therefore, *ek theou*, “of God.” As Thompson correctly asserts, “those born of the flesh may become those born of God (*ek theou*), by means of God’s generative power.”³¹³ Secondly, the Father has granted the “Son to have life in himself” (5:26). Life therefore resides in the Son (1:4; 11:25), who is the very embodiment of the Life of God (John 14:6) and the source of Life for the world³¹⁴. Third, the Spirit is the agent which brings the new birth into being. The noun *pneuma* occurs 24 times in John³¹⁵, “and he generally uses it as a reference to the Holy Spirit producing spiritual life.”³¹⁶

The person who enters the kingdom of God must “be born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). “To be ‘born of the Spirit,’ in John 3, connotes the Spirit producing new spiritual life.”³¹⁷ After surveying possible interpretations, McCabe concludes that “born of water and the Spirit” refers to the life-giving and purifying activity of the Spirit.”³¹⁸ Similarly, Stovell agrees that the

³¹³ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 32.

³¹⁴ John 1:4; 5:26, 39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 51; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31.

³¹⁵ John 1:32, 33 (twice); 3:5, 6 (twice), 8 (twice), 34; 4:23, 24 (twice); 6:63 (twice); 7:39 (twice); 11:33; 13:21; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; 19:30; 20:22.

³¹⁶ McCabe, *Born Of Water And The Spirit*, *DBSJ*, 90.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

means of this birth is through the Holy Spirit.³¹⁹ Schnackenburg writes, "Judaism had given much thought to the Holy Spirit and his eschatological functions. The Spirit was to bring about at the end an inward change of heart, which would make a ready and perfect fulfillment of the law of God possible (Ezek 11: 19; 36:25 IT.; Is 44:3; Jer 31:33)."³²⁰

The Greek word *anōthen* adverb of place can indicate (a) a source that is *from above* or (2) a subsequent point of time involving repetition, *again, anew*.³²¹ Novakovic suggests that Jesus' intended meaning is "from above."³²² This sounds convincing since all the agents involved in the new birth, that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are from above. Hence *anōthen* "designates the divine and heavenly world, by whose powers man must be renewed. The notion of the higher world as the dwelling-place of God and his angelic hosts, and as a way of indicating a region reserved to God and inaccessible to man, was familiar in Judaism."³²³

Evidence of The New Birth

³¹⁹ Beth M. Stovell, "The Birthing Spirit, The Childbearing God: Metaphors Of Motherhood And Their Place In Christian Discipleship," *PP* 4 (Autumn 2012), 18.

³²⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 370. On the Agency of the Spirit Deventer writes: The agency of God in this process is yet again stressed by the combination of a passive action (γεννηθῆναι) and Jesus's assertion that spirit gives birth to spirit (3:6; cf. 6:63). OT references to God as the one placing his Spirit inside his people (Ezek 36:26; 37:5, 14) portray this notion of God (who is spirit; 4:24) birthing his Spirit inside of those who believe (Köstenberger 2004, 124). Nicodemus will not re-enter the womb of his mother, but will, in continuity with the metaphorical language of the prologue, be conceived in the womb "from above" and given new life and lineage as a child of God.¹⁰ As with the prologue, birth language and language of belief bleed into one another (3:12, 15, 16, 18, 36). Deventer, "Spiritual Birth, Living Water," *CONSPECTUS*, 147.

³²¹ Novakovic, *John 1-10*, 75.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 1, 368.

After exploring the various contours of the new birth experience, the one inevitable conclusion is that a person who believes³²⁴ or has experienced the new birth has entered the Kingdom of God or has everlasting life. Although there are contentions regarding the sequential ordering of “believing” and “the new birth,” “it is important to notice here what is not said. The text, according to Michaels, defines no temporal or causal relationship between ‘believing’ and being ‘born of God,’ either to the effect that individuals are born of God because they believe, or that they may believe because they are already born of God. The point is simply that both expressions refer to the same group.”³²⁵

Regardless of one's ordering of believing and the new birth, the question remains whether there is an external verifiable way to justify one's claim to have experienced the new birth. John 3:8 says, "The effects of the Spirit's work can be discerned."³²⁶ Phillips, who argues that "the new birth is *revealed by its effects*"³²⁷ illustrates the analogy by using a contemporary example: "People who live in Florida know about hurricanes. But they do not see the wind blowing; they see the palm trees bending over and the debris flying. Likewise, we cannot see the new birth, but we observe its effects in our lives."³²⁸ Thus Phillips contends, "According to the Bible, if we have not been changed, we have not been born again, regardless of any spiritual experiences that

³²⁴ Just as the new birth involves a radical change “Faith also involves the most profound change.” Phillips, *John Vol. 1: Chapters 1-10*, 50.

³²⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 71.

³²⁶ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 83. Ryle argues that the new birth “Is a thorough change of heart, will, and character. It is a resurrection. It is a new creation. It is passing from death to life. It is the implanting in our dead hearts a new principle from above.” J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thought on the Gospels: John*, 3 Vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 1:122.

³²⁷ Phillips, *John Vol. 1: Chapters 1-10*, 155.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

we think we have had."³²⁹ Since believing is a continuous action on the part of believers "everyone born from above grows in the new divine life to the degree that they experience and accept the free and gracious work of the Holy Spirit in their lives."³³⁰

In the quest for evidential justification of assurance from the new birth, it is noticeable that although "those begotten from the Spirit are given the life of the Spirit and so live according to the Spirit,"³³¹ John does not enumerate their specific characteristics. Thus, while it is true that Jesus' teaching that the new birth is revealed in its effects challenges one to examine himself or herself for such evidence,³³² one equally acknowledges that since John does not directly enumerate the characteristics of those born by the Spirit, one must make inferences from other passages which describe the same phenomenon.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Martin and Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 72. Also see Köstenberger, *John*, 125. He writes, "In the present instance, the point of Jesus' analogy is that both wind and spiritual birth are mysterious in origin and movement – wind goes sovereignly where it pleases – yet though the wind's origin is invisible, its effects can be observed; it is the same with the Spirit. Despite its inscrutability, spiritual birth is real, as real as the mysterious movements of the wind. Moreover, just as the wind blows "where it pleases," the Spirit's operation is not subject to human control, eluding all efforts at manipulation." Harris likewise shares a similar view. Concerning the effects of the Spirit, he writes, "His work in humankind is beyond human control or sight or comprehension (cf. 1:13) but its results are clearly visible. Harris, *John*, 74. For commentators who share similar views see Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 93. Concerning this visible and discernible transformation, William Barclays adds: "You may not know how the Spirit works; but you can see the effect of the Spirit in human lives...We may not understand how the Spirit works; but the effects of the Spirit on the lives of men is there for all to see. The unanswerable argument for Christianity is the Christian Life. No man can disregard a faith which is able to make bad men good." William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 132. Borchert shares a similar view below. "First-century outside observers probably knew little of how Christians became followers of Jesus and they understood little concerning their eschatological destinies. But what they could sense was the presence and work of these children of the spirit in the midst of Pagan and Jewish societies. What they saw and heard from the Christians who were present in their societies was telling us to how they formulated their understandings of Christianity. Their lives were a witness to an unseen reality." Borchert, *John 1-11*, 177.

³³¹ William C. Weinrich, *CC: John 1:1-7:1* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 393.

³³² Phillips, *John Vol. 1: Chapters 1-10*, 156.

The New Birth in the Johannine Epistles

John uses the verb *gennaō* ten times in his First epistle³³³. Out of the ten occurrences, the verb appears eight times as perfect and twice as aorist. The tense distribution occurs as follows: perfect middle indicative,³³⁴ perfect middle participle,³³⁵ aorist active participle (5:1), aorist passive participle (5:18). Whereas the Gospel describes the nature of the new birth, 1 John concentrates on the evidence of the new birth, namely, doing righteousness (1 John 2:29); not committing sin (1 John 3:9); loving (1 John 4:7); believing that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:4); keeping oneself from sin (1 John 5:18).

The New Birth and Righteous Living (1 John 2:29)

The first of these new birth tests occurs in 1 Jn 2:28-29.³³⁶ John uses the endearing term *teknion* (children) to express their familial relationship with God. The concept of natural resemblance expressed by the saying "like father, like son" becomes the basis of comparison. Just as a father passes his characteristics to children, those born by God³³⁷ exhibit His character. The particular aspect John has in mind is the righteousness of God.

³³³ I John 2:9; 3:9 (2x); 4:7; 5:1 (3x), 4, 18 (2x).

³³⁴ I John 2:9; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1.

³³⁵ I John 3:9; 5:1, 4, 18.

³³⁶ "This is the first occurrence in the letter of the theme of new birth with God as Father, a theme that is foundational in John's gospel (1:3; 3:3 - 8) and now becomes a persistent and important theme in this letter (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18)." Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, ZECNT. Gen. Ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 140.

³³⁷ "Born of him may seem in this context to refer to Christ, but the consistent Johannine terms are to be born 'of God' or 'of the Spirit, and it is 'against the tenor of the New Testament to speak of Christians as "begotten of Christ" (Law). We must therefore, suppose that there is an abrupt change of person between verses 28 and 29, the he and him referring in verse 28 to Christ and in verse 29 to God. This would certainly be a better transition to the next chapter." John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 122.

He "draws an inference from the assumption that all his readers would agree with, namely, that God is righteous."³³⁸ From this shared premise, he builds his argument. "If you know as a fact (*eidete*) that God is righteous, John says, then you will perceive as a logical consequence (*ginöskete*) that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. The child exhibits the parent's character because he shares the parent's nature." The *eäv* (if) standing at the beginning of v.29 "is intended to emphasize that what follows is the starting point for a logical argument: If you know that he is just."³³⁹ Since God's righteousness stands beyond dispute, the inevitable conclusion is "if the readers know that God is righteous, they may be sure that everyone who does right is born of him."³⁴⁰

1 John 2:29 provides one of the clearest epistemological bases for evaluating assurance of salvation since the evidence of new birth is practicing righteousness. As Stott argues, "The false teachers (in their incipient Gnosticism) may have called their initiation into gnosis a 'regeneration'; John shows that righteousness, not knowledge, is the principal mark of the regenerate."³⁴¹ Similarly, Kruse writes agrees that "this verse begins a long treatment of the fundamental connection between knowing God and doing righteousness (2:29-3:10), which provides a basis for distinguishing those who are the children of God from those who are the children of the devil."³⁴²

³³⁸ Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 140.

³³⁹ Urban C. von Wahlde, *ECC: The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 103.

³⁴⁰ Colin G Kruse, *PNTC: The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 123.

³⁴¹ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 122.

³⁴² Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 123. John leaves no middle room. A person is their born of God or the devil. Parsenius notices that the use of the Greek word *pas* (all, every) "is coupled with a participle to make a broad generalization that divides the world into two opposing groups. The purpose of this construction is to place before the members of the community two stark options, and then invite them to make a choice." George L. Parsenius, *First, Second, and Third John*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 92.

The New Birth and Sin (1 John 3:9)

The next appearance of the new birth motif occurs in 3:9, where John asserts that “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” What stands out in this context is John’s contention that “whoever has been born of God does not sin” (v. 9). This verse, with its parallel v.6a,³⁴³ presents a difficulty. Stott writes that “these expressions have sometimes been taken to teach that a true Christian, one who has been born of God, is constitutionally incapable of sinning.”³⁴⁴ However, this cannot be maintained in light of 1 Jn 1:7-10; 2:1.³⁴⁵ Karen states the difficulty as follows:

The statement that “no one who has been born of God sins” immediately raises the existential question, “Who, then, is born of God?” And it seems to make John contradict himself in light of 1 John 1:7 and 2:1, verses that offer to believers the blood of Jesus as a remedy for acknowledged sin. And why does John exhort his readers in 5:16 to pray for the brother or sister who sins if a Christian is not able to sin?³⁴⁶

In resolving the apparent contradiction between the “inability to sin” (3:6, 9) and the provision of forgiveness for believers (2:1), the tense of the Greek verb in 3:9 offers a reasonable resolution. “In Greek, the verbs express continued action, not a single occurrence. Therefore, by

³⁴³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 302.

³⁴⁴ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 130.

³⁴⁵ “But such an interpretation cannot be maintained, unless we are prepared to say that John contradicts himself. In 1:8, 10 he described those who deny that they are sinners by nature and by practice as deceiving themselves and calling God a liar; and in 2:1, although he said he was writing ‘so that you will not sin’, he explicitly added that ‘if anybody does sin’ (evidently a possibility to be considered), gracious provision has been made for his for-giveness. It is plain, therefore, that John is not denying the possibility of sin in the Christian.” Stott, *The Letters of John*, 130.

³⁴⁶ Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 147.

using the present tenses of the Greek verbs, John is saying that the believer cannot practice habitual sin."³⁴⁷ Stated differently, they "will not continue to sin."³⁴⁸

John links the inability to continue in sin to the new birth experience, which explains the "moral character of a child of God."³⁴⁹ The tense of the verb *gegennēmenos*, perfect passive participle, reflects the durative nature of the new birth state, which denotes that although the action took place in the past, its influence continues to the present.³⁵⁰ In addition, he mentions the presence of God's seed as another reason. According to Marshall, "most commentators take 'seed' to refer metaphorically to a divine principle of life which abides in the believer."³⁵¹

The new birth and God's seed in believers lead Lieu to conclude that John's concern "is no longer with identifying people by their actions and with concluding, but instead with taking for granted the actions that will result not from their own choices but from a state for which they are not responsible."³⁵² Putting these things together, "a person who is born of God and possesses God's nature cannot live in habitual sin."³⁵³ Although "the possibility of falling into occasional

³⁴⁷ Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 303. Karen offers a similar resolution. "The most common way of explaining what John means in order to resolve both the existential angst of Christians who nevertheless sin and John's apparent contradiction of himself is to press the durative aspect of the present tense of the verb in 3:9, "does not do sin" (ἀμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ), to mean that those born of God do not and cannot sin habitually, even while recognizing that they do sin occasionally." Jobs, 1, 2, & 3 John, 147.

³⁴⁸ Thomas F. Johnson, *NIBC: 1, 2 AND 3 John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 74.

³⁴⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *NICNT: The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 186.

³⁵⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 303.

³⁵¹ Marshall, *NICNT: The Epistles of John*, 186.

³⁵² Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John, A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 136.

³⁵³ Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 303.

sin is always present, as every Christian can testify"³⁵⁴ it still does not negate John's contention that "whatever is born of God must share God's character and his opposition to sin."³⁵⁵

John recaps his thoughts on the link between the new birth and refraining from sin in 5:18. He still insists that "whoever has been born of God does not sin." As already explained, this is John's reiterative of the incompatibility between sin and those born of God. Jones recaps the tension between the simultaneous possibility of sin and victory in the believer's life.

Having distinguished between sin that is and is not unto death, the author immediately makes clear that he has not abandoned his core conviction that the one born from God does not sin (5:18a; see comments at 3:6, 9). The writer remains consistent about the absence of sin as the pattern of living for a believer, though he constantly makes provisions for believers who do sin.³⁵⁶

The New Birth and Love

John appeals to God as the source of love and the new birth. Just as believers are of (ek) God (4:4, 6), in a similar sense, God is the source of (ek) love (4:7). This leads to his conclusion that "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (4:7). Marshall says that since love "has its origin in God and belongs to the divine sphere... it follows that anybody who shows love must belong to that sphere; he has been born of God and now lives in the knowledge of God."³⁵⁷ Lieu adds an interesting dimension. "Love," she writes, "is not simply something commanded by God but has its origin with God and so "belongs to" (ek) God."³⁵⁸ Hence her conclusion that in

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 303.

³⁵⁵ Marshall, *NICNT: The Epistles of John*, 187.

³⁵⁶ Peter Rhea Jones, *SHCB: 1, 2 & 3 John* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2009), 231.

³⁵⁷ Marshall, *NICNT: The Epistles of John*, 211.

³⁵⁸ Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 177.

light of the common source, “it should then be second nature for those who have themselves also just been described as “belonging to”(ek) God (4:6; cf. v. 2).”³⁵⁹

Although the text does not define the object of love in v. 7, Stotts asserts that "everyone who loves, that is, loves either God or neighbor with that selfless devotion which alone is true love according to John's teaching, has been born of God and knows God."³⁶⁰ Love for God and neighbor harmonizes with John's teachings.³⁶¹

The New Birth and Overcoming

John further links the new birth and the concept of overcoming in chapter five. Those who overcome the world as those "born of God" (5:4). Overcoming in this context relates to the forces that hinder loving God and keeping his commandments which John writes are "not burdensome" (1Jn 5:3). Since the world presents lust of the eyes and flesh as well as the pride of life as baits to disobedience, overcoming can be expanded to including "liberation from bondage, from secular allurements, from potentially overpowering desires."³⁶²

To the question of how the believer can keep God's commandments, "John answers that he has been given the power by God to overcome the forces of temptation which would prevent

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 177.

³⁶⁰ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 163.

³⁶¹ Lieu also writes, “The author does not distinguish between different kinds of love or different objects to which it might be directed, and this prompted some later scribes to provide an object ("God" or "a brother") for the "everyone who loves" of the following clause; the author would not have disagreed, but the absence is not an oversight (cf. also 3:14 and commentary). Although he does know that love can be misdirected (2:15), this is only a theoretical possibility and is almost self-negating. The nature of authentic love has already been defined (3:16), and it is this that enables him to say that love has its origin in God: hence his words are not a license to claim that wherever love, however defined, is felt and expressed, it originates in God.” Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 177.

³⁶² Jones, *I, 2, & 3 John*, 220.

his obedience."³⁶³ This power is claimed through faith. Faith in Christ then becomes the means of overcoming (v.5). "To believe that Jesus has been victorious is to have the power that enables us also to win the battle, for we know that our foe is already defeated and therefore powerless."³⁶⁴

In conclusion, 1 John demonstrates that the new birth is discernible in the life of believers. Whereas the evidence of the new birth is presented as doing righteousness (1 John 2:29); not committing sin (1 John 3:9); loving (1 John 4:7); believing that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:4); keeping oneself from sin (1 John 5:18), the absence of righteousness, continuity in the practice of sin or sinful lifestyle, lack of love for God and neighbor indicate the absence of the reality of salvation (new birth).

Test Three: Keeping The Word Test

Believing in John is neither peering into a blind alley of uncertainty nor a mystical experience. He centers it on a solid, tangible epistemological foundation. As already established, the Father and the Son are the primary objects of belief. At the heart of the Johannine literature, *logos* is a descriptive title for Jesus. While in the prologue to the Gospel of John, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1), in the first epistle of John, he is called "the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). Similarly, in Revelation, he is known as "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). Thus,

³⁶³ Marshall, *NICNT: The Epistles of John*, 228.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 228. "John does not teach here some enthusiastic triumphalism, but points to faith in the true gospel of Jesus Christ that is "ours," that is, that held by the author and those who share like faith. In John 16:33 Jesus said that he has "overcome" the world (Gk. perfect, *νενίκηκα*). Therefore, those who have faith in Christ have faith that this is so, and likewise that faith overcomes all that is of the world (cf. 2:13 – 14; 4:4; 5:5). The statement here that everything/everyone born of God overcomes the world informs the interpretation of 2:14 – 15, where the "young men" (*νεανίσκοι*) are said to be overcomers." Jobs, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 217.

logos is first and foremost "a designation of Christ."³⁶⁵ He embodies the Father's message as the one sent by the Father.

In a secondary sense, *logos* also represents 'sayings' among which we have the sayings of Jesus (Jn 2:22; 4:50). Although John differentiates between the words (*logos*) of Jesus and Scripture (*graphē*), he nevertheless puts both on the same pedestal (John 2:22). In putting the words of Jesus on the same pedestal with Scripture, Klink is correct in his assessment that "the disciples had come to see as authoritative and complementary the word of God and the Word of God."³⁶⁶ Thus, Jesus expected his (1) *logos* to be believed (Jn 5:24), (2) *logos* to abide in disciples or believers (Jn 5:38; 8:37), (3) disciples to continue in his *logos* (Jn 8:31), (4) *logos* to be understood (Jn 8:43), (5) *logos* to be kept.³⁶⁷

A glance at the Johannine corpus reveals that what believers or disciples must keep cannot be limited to only *logos*. The totality of the words of Jesus elicits obedience. Hence, besides *logos*, the study includes other semantically related words like *rēmā*, *graphē*, and *entolē* of the Father and the Son. Each of these words refers to the authoritative words, sayings, and commands of Jesus and the Father meant to be believed and obeyed (kept). Since this dissertation is an epistemological quest, we shall first investigate the relationship between believing and the word.

³⁶⁵ Klink III, *John*, 87.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁶⁷ John 8:51-52, 55; 14:23-24. Concerning the link between believing and the word, Brown makes a keen observation. "Therefore, it can be concluded that "across the Book of Signs, believing becomes the fundamental commandment by which Jesus calls people to live. He then goes on to teach, however, that this belief must not be based on signs alone, but must be founded in the word of Jesus--both his being as the Word of God and the words of his teaching." Sherri Brown, "Believing in the Gospel of John: The Ethical Imperative to Becoming Children of God," in *Johannine Ethics, The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, Eds. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 15.

Link Between Believing and the Word in the Gospel of John

Scripture plays a crucial role in coming to faith in John. The faith of the disciples is confirmed as “they believed the Scripture,” where scripture means “the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22). The Samaritans come to faith through the “sayings of the woman” (John 4:39) and later “many more believed because of his own word” (John 4:41). Since Jesus is the WORD, a rejection of or an attitude of disbelief towards his “word” amounts to a rejection of his person.

The bread of life discourse in John 6 is a classic instance where the rejection of the words of Jesus was tantamount to a denial of Jesus and eternal life. After hearing Jesus’ invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:53-58), some of his disciples (ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ) retorted that “this is a hard saying; who can understand it?” (6:60). Who were these disciples?

Regarding the identity of these disciples, Hendrickson explains,

Those who heard Jesus deliver this discourse on The Bread of Life are by the author divided into three groups: “the Jews” (hostile leaders and their followers), “the disciples,” and “the twelve.” The last two groups in reality over-lapped; or may be represented by concentric circles, the larger of which represents the “disciples” (6:66), the smaller “the twelve” (6:67). The reaction of the Jews has been stated: they asked questions which originated in hearts of unbelief, self-satisfaction, and glorying in tradition (6:28, 30, 31); they muttered and belittled (6:41, 42); they even wrangled among each other (6:52). The present section (6:60-65) describes the reaction of the disciples. This is the group of more or less regular followers of the Lord, as 6:66 clearly indicates.³⁶⁸

As for the meaning of this response, the verb *akouein*, standing at the first part of v. 60, “means to hear without acceptance.”³⁶⁹ In other words, what they heard was “not hard in the sense of ‘harsh,’ but more like the modern English usage of incredible.”³⁷⁰ Hendriksen reaches a

³⁶⁸ Hendriksen, *John*, 245.

³⁶⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 296.

³⁷⁰ Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 272.

similar conclusion. “It is clear from the answer of Jesus (6:61-65) and from their own final reaction (6:66) that they did not merely mean that the sermon was difficult to understand, but that it was hard to accept.”³⁷¹ As it turns out, they understood it enough to be “offended” (v. 61). In an attitude of unbelief, “they would rather stumble and grumble over his words and raise questions over his pedigree than trust in him.”³⁷²

To clear their misunderstanding, Jesus states the connection between His words and the Spirit (6:63). Brown is correct when he observes that “Jesus is once more affirming that man cannot gain life on his own. If Jesus is divine revelation comes down from heaven like bread to nourish men, his purpose is to communicate to them the principle of eternal life.”³⁷³ Consequently, “the man who accepts the words of Jesus will receive the lifegiving Spirit.”³⁷⁴ On the other hand, since “these words, in their deep, spiritual meaning, become instruments of salvation for his people,”³⁷⁵ the one who rejects them rejects life.

With the issue clarified, the word of Jesus becomes a dividing line. Eventually, “from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (6:66). Jesus had already classified the disciples who rejected his words as unbelievers (6:64). But the twelve stayed. They “distance themselves from those who described his teaching as ‘hard’ (60) and are determined to listen to his words and accept them. They too have scarcely understood what he has said, but they recognize it as words full of lifegiving power because he has said them.”³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 245.

³⁷² Paul Louis Metzger, *The Gospel of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 102.

³⁷³ Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 300.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Hendriksen, *John*, 245.

³⁷⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 75.

When Jesus asked whether His disciples, in this case, the twelve, would also want to “go away” (6:67), Peter’s first response on behalf of the twelve, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (6:68), is telling. “The reference is clearly to what Jesus himself has said (6:63).”³⁷⁷ Furthermore, “Peter knows that the words of Jesus are more than mere sounds or dead utterances. They are vital and dynamic, full of spirit and life, means unto salvation, means of grace (on everlasting life see 3:16; cf. 1:4).”³⁷⁸ Beasley Murray also understands Peter as saying that “Jesus speaks words that give to those who receive them the life of the world to come.”³⁷⁹

The second part of Peter’s answer, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (6:69 connects believing in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” with “the words of eternal life.” To believe in him then cannot be separated from receiving his words. Therefore, “faith,” according to Schnackenburg, “signifies submission to all that Jesus teaches and prescribes as his commandments.”³⁸⁰

The Closing Ministry of Jesus: John 12

The closing words of the public ministry of Jesus in John 12:44-50 “summarize his identity and his mission.”³⁸¹ The passage above recaps “familiar assertions that present him as

³⁷⁷ Hendriksen, *John*, 248.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *WBC: John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 97.

³⁸⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Christian Morality According to John, in *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology (John's Gospel and Epistles)* (ed. Michael J. Taylor; New York: Alba House, 1970], p. 191).

³⁸¹ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 276.

the one who represents God, who speaks on behalf of God, and who brings God's light into the world."³⁸² As the one speaking for God, he declares that "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me" (John 12:44). This "believing" is equivalent to "hearing his words" (John 12:47) and "receiving his words" (John 12:48). Accordingly, to disbelieve or reject the words of Jesus is to leave Him.³⁸³

John brings out two further intriguing connections. The first relation specifies the connection between the words of Jesus and God's eschatological judgment. Jesus declares that the "word" he had spoken will be the judge on the last day. "At that time, when Jesus' word serves as the judge (12:48), "how one has responded to Jesus' word determines what judgment will be passed, because this word has come from the Father and has been spoken by the embodied Word of God."³⁸⁴ Bruner writes even more forcefully, "Jesus' words, not His person,

³⁸² Ibid. For a similar conclusion, also see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel According to John, A Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 882.

³⁸³ Klink III, *John*, 563.

³⁸⁴ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 277. Further, Rainbow adds: The position of this statement at the close of the first half of John's Gospel gives it special prominence. Having the copula ("is") with "eternal life," it is like John 17:3: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God? Conflating the two verses, we see that to know God is to know what is his will, what he commands, and in the doing thereof consists eternal life. In the context of John 12:50a God's command refers, in the first instance, to what he enjoined upon Jesus to say and speak to the world (In 12:49, 50b). While Jesus' word includes his claim of unity with the Father (In 12:44-45), it also includes his sayings for people to "keep' (In 12:47). So God told Jesus what to command his disciples, that they might have life. This could be taken in either of two ways. It could mean, in keeping with a topos of the Old Testament and of Judaism, that God's commandment promises eternal life, that doing his will now is the way to insure life in the age to come; or it could mean that God's commandments describe human life as God intends it to be, so that eternal life itself consists of performing them (perhaps the sense of Lev 18:5; Deut 32:46-47; Ps 119:93; Ezek 20:11; Sir 45:5; In 5:39). Between these alternatives we need not choose. John's diction may well comprise both. Love for Jesus takes the form of keeping his commandments (In 14:15). What someone values and stands for shows who that person is. To love the person is to share that person's passions (and hatreds). One who is drawn to things that Jesus hates and is repelled by things that he loves can hardly claim to love Jesus. In his commandments Jesus has told his disciples what he values and what he abominates. By doing what Jesus commands, a disciple demonstrates esteem. Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 330.

are judgment"³⁸⁵ This solemn statement must forever put to rest the callous and incredulous disposition towards the word upon which hangs the destinies of the hearers.

Standing at the last verse in chapter 12 is the second intriguing thought linking the Father's command and everlasting life. What is this Father's command that stands in relationship with eternal life? According to Thompson, "Eternal life is God's "commandment," what God purposes for the world, and what he has shown and commanded Jesus to say and to do (5: 19,26-30; 6:38-40,45--47; 7:16; 10:18)."³⁸⁶ Keener offers a most perceptive summary of the connection under discussion:

"The Father's commandment is eternal life" (12:50) is presumably elliptical for "obedience to the Father's command produces eternal life," but also fits the identification of the word (1:4), Jesus' words (6:68), and knowing God (17:3) with life. For John, the concept of "command" should not be incompatible with believing in Jesus (6:27; cf. 8:12; 12:25), which is the basis for eternal life (3:15-16; 6:40, 47; 11:25; 20:31); faith involves obedience (3:36; cf. Acts 5:32; Rom 1:5; 2:8; 6:16-17; 15:18; 16:19, 26; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:17). Jesus always obeys his Father's commands (8:29), including the

³⁸⁵ Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 743.

³⁸⁶ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 277. Further, Rainbow adds: The position of this statement at the close of the first half of John's Gospel gives it special prominence. Having the copula ("is") with "eternal life," it is like John 17:3: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God? Conflating the two verses, we see that to know God is to know what is his will, what he commands, and in the doing thereof consists eternal life. In the context of John 12:50a God's command refers, in the first instance, to what he enjoined upon Jesus to say and speak to the world (In 12:49, 50b). While Jesus' word includes his claim of unity with the Father (In 12:44-45), it also includes his sayings for people to "keep' (In 12:47). So God told Jesus what to command his disciples, that they might have life. This could be taken in either of two ways. It could mean, in keeping with a topos of the Old Testament and of Judaism, that God's commandment promises eternal life, that doing his will now is the way to insure life in the age to come; or it could mean that God's commandments describe human life as God intends it to be, so that eternal life itself consists of performing them (perhaps the sense of Lev 18:5; Deut 32:46-47; Ps 119:93; Ezek 20:11; Sir 45:5; In 5:39). Between these alternatives we need not choose. John's diction may well comprise both. Love for Jesus takes the form of keeping his commandments (In 14:15). What someone values and stands for shows who that person is. To love the person is to share that person's passions (and hatreds). One who is drawn to things that Jesus hates and is repelled by things that he loves can hardly claim to love Jesus. In his commandments Jesus has told his disciples what he values and what he abominates. By doing what Jesus commands, a disciple demonstrates esteem. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 330. Michael similarly writes, "The Gospel began with the notice that "In him was life" (1:4), and its first major section ended with John's testimony that "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will never see life" (3:36). Now its second major section ends with Jesus' own claim, "I know that his command is eternal life" (v. 50), and when the Gospel writer finally comes to state what he wants for his readers, it is "that believing you might have life in his name" (20:31). "Life" is the Gospel's overarching theme, and even though Jesus will rarely mention it explicitly in the next five chapters, all that he says from now on will serve to define what it means for his disciples and for the reader of the Gospel." Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 718.

command to face death (10:18; 14:31); his disciples must follow his model of obedience to his commandments by loving one another sacrificially (13:34; 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12).³⁸⁷

The Word in the Priestly Prayer of John 17

In the priestly prayer recorded in John 17, John records only one way to discipleship. Here, it is the keeping of the word that characterizes true disciples. On the one hand, disciples are those given to Jesus out of the world by the Father (John 17:6). To them, Jesus manifested the Father's name (17:6). The active role of disciples in response to the Father's actions through him is simply stated, "You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word (*logon*)" (17:6).³⁸⁸

In terms of the scope, "the singular of "word" (*logon*) is to be understood as a collective for God's message, the good news or the gospel, and not as a reference to individual commands of God or to the teachings of Jesus."³⁸⁹ Notice that "the verb is in the perfect tense, indicating the continuing implications of their obedience."³⁹⁰ Jesus saw the obedience of the disciples proleptically as an accomplished fact.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Keener, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2, p. 889.

³⁸⁸ F. F. Bruce insightfully writes, "They showed themselves to be truly 'his own people by believing in him, acknowledging that his teaching came from God and accepting it accordingly. They 'kept the word of God which he communicated to them by laying it up in their hearts and obeying it in their lives. They thus proved in experience the truth of his promise: 'If any one is willing to do the will of God, he will know whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own initiative' (John 7:17). In recognizing that Jesus teaching came from God they recognized at the same time that he himself came from God, as the Father's 'sent one.'" F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 331.

³⁸⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *NAC: John 12-21* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 193.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.* For a similar view, also see Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 984.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* Borchert shares a similar view. He writes, "Although some commentators are tempted to discuss the anachronistic nature of this statement, such a discussion is unnecessary. Of course, John was writing after the resurrection and understood that the disciples had been failures and were later restored. But that does not mean that Jesus could not have proleptically viewed the disciples as fulfilling God's intention for them in spite of their failures." Borchert, *NAC: John 12-21*, 193.

John 17:8 further highlights the significance of obedience. Here the disciples' relationship to the words of Christ is stated in four connected dimensions. First, Jesus declares, "I have given to them the words which You have given Me (17:8). Second, he bears witness that "they have received them" (17:8). Third, by receiving, they "have known surely that I came forth from You" (17:8). And fourth, "they have believed that You sent Me" (17:8). These statements tie together the various ideas about obedience from "a closing unified incarnational perspective."³⁹²

The prayer in John also brings to the fore that the word's keeping engenders the world's hatred against the disciples of Christ. In stating that "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (17:14), Jesus was declaring the *raison d'être* for the longstanding persecution and hatred that shall cast their longstanding shadow over His church in the world. Since the disciples are characterized as those who believe, accept, and keep the word of the Father given through Jesus, the world's hatred for God extends by default to them. In other words, without allegiance to the word, there will be no persecution and hatred.

John records a complex relationship between the Word and the world.³⁹³ Positively, God loves the world (3:16) and sends Jesus to the world (10:36). The Word comes as the Savior (4:42), and the light³⁹⁴ of the world to (1) take away the sin of the world (1:29), (2) save the

³⁹² Borchert, *John 12-21*, 193.

³⁹³ "It is extremely important to understand what John means by the word world. Except for a few instances where the "world" refers to the physical earth, the created globe, the word always has a negative value. The "world" in John is a symbol for all that is in rebellion against God, all that is loveless and disobedient, all that is selfish and sinful. . . . This ugly, sinful, rebellious world, this sewer of infidelity, this glut of endless selfishness, this habitation of cruelty, this lover of violence, this promoter of greed, this maker of idols—this world God loved, and loved so much that he sent his Son." D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus, An Evangelical Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 53-54 [Electronic Edition].

³⁹⁴ John 1:98:12; 9:5; 11:9.

world,³⁹⁵ (3) and give life to the world (6:33, 51). Tragically, the one world did not know the one sent by the Father (1:10). Although he comes as the light of the world,³⁹⁶ the men of the world who love darkness rather than light (3:19) hates him because he uncovers its evil works (7:7). Thus, “Jesus characterized the world as hating the family of God, even as it hated him (15:18), persecuting the servants of the Savior because their continuation of his ministry will expose its willful unbelief (cf. 15:18-25; 17:14).”³⁹⁷

Since the world hates the Word who comes from above,³⁹⁸ it naturally extends the hatred to disciples who identify with the Word (15:19). Even after Jesus’ departure, the world’s hatred continues because it cannot receive the Spirit who dwells with believers (14:17) in its multiple roles as their teacher (14:26) and helper.³⁹⁹ Thus, tribulation and opposition from the world are inevitable (16:33). On their part, believers must choose to hate their lives in this world to “keep it unto eternal life” (12:25).

Third, the word is the template or standard for the disciples' sanctification. Since the word is truth (17:17),

The disciples are to be sanctified in or by truth, which is God's word (17: 17, 19; Ps 119:142, 160). In other words, they are dedicated for their task by means of God's word, which they have received and believed; they have become part of God's purposes and mission through hearing and responding to God's words, given to Jesus, and subsequently to them (v. 8). Jesus' prayer recalls his earlier statement that the disciples have already been made clean through the word he has spoken to them (15:3). Having been cleansed by Jesus' word, now they are to be "sanctified" or dedicated to and by God (17: 17, 19b), preparing them for the Son to send them into the world (v. 18).⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ John 3:17; 12:47.

³⁹⁶ John 1:9:8; 9:5; 11:9.

³⁹⁷ J. Lanier Burns, “John 14:1-27: The Comfort Of God’s Presence,” *BSAC* 172 (Jul 2015), 309.

³⁹⁸ John 8:23; 15:18.

³⁹⁹ John 15:26; 16:17.

⁴⁰⁰ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 355.

Fourthly, Jesus' petition, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (17:20), places the "word" at the center of witnessing. The very word disciples believe and keep is also the object of witnessing. "Throughout John, people are brought to Jesus by the witness of others (1:40, 44; 4:29-30); the Gospel itself serves as a witness to Jesus (20:31)."⁴⁰¹

Keeping the Word and the Hope of Immortality

John states that life is only in the Father, who grants the Son to have life in himself. As it stands in the purpose statement in John 20:31, it is only through believing in the Son that leads to life. Interestingly, in his response to his interlocutors in John 8, Jesus declares, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). "My sayings" in this context "are the words which his father has given him to utter"⁴⁰² or "His revelatory word."⁴⁰³ Hendriksen maintains that "to keep the word of Christ means "a. accept it by faith, b. obey it, and c. stand guard over it."⁴⁰⁴

Schnackenburg comments perceptively about the connection between remaining in the word and eternal life. According to Schnackenburg, Jesus

repeats in revelatory style his promise to anyone who keeps and observes his word: they will not see death to eternity. This is simply a new phrasing of the constant saving

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 356.

⁴⁰² Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 203.

⁴⁰³ Martin and Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 168.

⁴⁰⁴ Hendriksen, *NTC: John*, 62. For further clarification, he continues "Anyone (whether Jew or Gentile, it does not matter in the least) who does this will certainly never see (i.e., experience; cf. on 3:3) death. As is evident from parallel passages in this Gospel, death, as here used, is separation from the love of God, and experiencing the crushing weight of his wrath and condemnation, and that forever. Cf. also Matt. 25:46; II Tim. 1:9. The entire expression is, of course, a litotes. The real meaning is that the person who keeps the word of Christ will, indeed, see (everlasting) life and will partake of it in all its sweetness and beauty." Ibid.

proclamation, 'Whoever believes has eternal life', but it is deliberately phrased in these terms to emphasize the 'remaining in Jesus' word' (v. 31). In spite of all the Jewish objections and insults, those who believe in Christ must not let themselves be deterred from holding on to Jesus' word and observing it. Both ideas are probably contained in *tereiv*, keeping the word of Jesus which, as the word of God, enters into a person and becomes powerful in him (cf. 17:6,14,17; 15:3; 1 Jn 1:10; 2:14), and meeting the demands contained in it (cf. 14:21,23; 1 Jn 2:5,7). The promise, 'he will not see death to eternity', is made to everyone who keeps and proves his word in this way. It is an old expression (cf. Ps 88:49 LXX; Lk 2:26; Heb 11:5), which is picked up by the Jews in v. 52 with 'will not taste death.'⁴⁰⁵

Similar to the observation above, F. F. Bruce writes the following:

Again, what is said here is not peculiar to the Fourth Gospel; the Sermon on the Mount ends with the affirmation that those who hear Jesus' words and put them into practice have provided a secure foundation for life, while those who hear them without translating them into action expose themselves to irremediable catastrophe (Matt. 7:24 ff.; Luke 6:47 ff.). 'If anyone keeps my word (logos) Jesus has already said in this Gospel, 'he will never see death' (8:51); the corollary is that those who refuse to keep his word will never see life (cf. John 3:36). The word of judgment on the last day, therefore, is not different from the word of life already sounded forth. The message which proclaims life to the believer is the message which proclaims judgment to the disobedient. To bestow life, not to execute judgment, was the purpose of the Son's coming into the world; nevertheless, judgment is the inevitable effect of his coming for those who turn their backs on life.'⁴⁰⁶

Linking obedience to the promise of eternal life underscores then, the gravity of obedience. The repetition of 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death' by his interlocutors in 8:52 implies that they understood what he meant, that is, that keeping his saying is an essential condition for avoiding death.⁴⁰⁷ Linking obedience to the promise of eternal life underscores the gravity of keeping the words of Jesus.

⁴⁰⁵ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 2, 219.

⁴⁰⁶ Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 205.

⁴⁰⁷ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 196.

Continuity In the Word

Just as believing in Jesus and abiding in him is a continuous lifelong experience, continuing in the Word distinguishes true believers and disciples from all others. Thus, after their initial belief in Jesus, he set forth the litmus test of a true disciple by the declaration, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Jn 8:31). Bruce explains that "to remain in Jesus' word is to adhere to his teaching – to direct their lives by it."⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, for Hendriksen, "One abides in the Word of Christ by making it the rule of one's life. In other words, *obedience* is the same thing as abiding in the Word."⁴⁰⁹ Consequently, only remaining in the word of Jesus leads to true discipleship.

Schnackenburg provides additional elucidation of the significance of this text. According to him, "the evangelist's real concern becomes apparent in v. 31,"⁴¹⁰ where he is addressing Jews who have been in the faith for some time (perfect participle) and for whom "the saying of Jesus that they must remain in his word applies."⁴¹¹ Notice how Jesus characterizes those who do not continue in his word as unbelievers. In his dialogue with the Jews after the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus affirms that although they search the scriptures (Jn 5:39), they do not have the Father's word abiding in them (Jn 5:38), a state which constitutes unbelief. Likewise, he

⁴⁰⁸ Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 196.

⁴⁰⁹ Hendriksen, *NTC: John*, 52.

⁴¹⁰ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 2, 204.

⁴¹¹ Ibid. For the rationale behind the text, Schnackenburg writes: "The evangelist needed a remark such as the one in v. 30 as a transition. We can therefore reasonably assume that the evangelist has in mind Jewish Christians of his time who perhaps as a result of Jewish counter-propaganda are in danger of lapsing from faith in Christ. This assumption is strengthened by the term 'disciples' which is used here, (truly my disciples) which means all believers, not just the men who followed Jesus in his lifetime (cf. 4:1; 6:60,66). This concept of 'discipleship' is given a polemical edge in 9:27-28, where the Pharisees indignantly reject the idea of becoming 'disciples of Jesus' because they are 'disciples of Moses.'" Ibid.

tells his interlocutors in John 8 that their murderous intent and hostility towards him is because "my word has no place in you" (Jn 8:37). As Hendriksen remarks, "We have here another instance of litotes. The real meaning is you completely reject my word!"⁴¹² "My word has no place in you" means "no acceptance."⁴¹³

Keeping His Commandments as the Test of Love

John presents the keeping of God's commandments as a test of love for Jesus as part of the farewell discourse. First, he describes the Father and the Son as subjects of divine love. In this description, the Father loves the Son,⁴¹⁴ the world (Jn 3:16), and Jesus' disciples (17:23). John also records Jesus' love for Martha, her sister, and Lazarus (Jn 11:5); the subjects of his redemption (Jn 13:1); the Father (Jn 14:31) and a disciple John describes as the disciple Jesus loved.⁴¹⁵ Since love involves the Father/Son and disciples, anyone who belongs to the Father loves Jesus (Jn 8:42). Hence, love binds the Father and the Son and believers (Jn 17:26).

John 14:15-21 continues "the mutuality between God (Father and Son) and the disciples."⁴¹⁶ In this pericope, Klink observes, "Jesus introduces the common denominator in their mutuality, the promised Holy Spirit."⁴¹⁷ However, "before introducing the Spirit, Jesus

⁴¹² Hendriksen, *NTC: John*, 54.

⁴¹³ Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 198.

⁴¹⁴ Jn 3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26.

⁴¹⁵ Jn 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20.

⁴¹⁶ Klink III, *John*, 631. Klink is right that "Fellowship and partnership with God is a relationship of love, not only God's love for us, but also our love for God. But love according to this Gospel is never a sentiment or an emotion; it is always moral.' Up to this point in the Gospel, the love of God for his people has been dominant; the disciple's love for God has hardly been mentioned, and even then only implicitly (see 8:42). But from this point onward it becomes the explicit theme." Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

explains that the nature of the relationship between God and his children consists in love and obedience.”⁴¹⁸ In saying, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15), Jesus states a condition. “*Eáv* introduces a “second class” cond. referring to the future, in this case, with the probability of fulfillment assumed.”⁴¹⁹ Klink is correct that “the condition here is not intended to threaten the disciples to respond with love, but properly to define love,”⁴²⁰ which in this context means to obey.

The object of love is also clearly defined. John recognizes that humans can love. However, concerning the object of love, humans (*anthropoi*), because of evil deeds, love darkness rather than light (Jn 3:19). In addition, they love the “praise of men more than the praise of God” (Jn 12:43). In contrast with the misdirected understanding and expression of love above, to love Jesus is to keep ‘his’ commandments. “The Greek emphasizes the pronoun “my” (“my commandments”) in a way that suggests that even in his physical absence, Jesus is the standard for the life of the disciple, for he is the one who fulfilled the law (cf. 8:31). Love for God is always founded upon and directed toward Christ.”⁴²¹ As Jesus comes as the very word of God and the sent-one, he squarely places himself at the center of the allegiance of his disciples.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Harris, *John*, 260.

⁴²⁰ Klink III, *John*, 631.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² J. Ramsey Michaels provides an insightful comment here. He writes, “Jesus continues to address his disciples, with another “If” clause: “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (v. 15).⁷⁷ Perhaps surprisingly, he does not pick up on the “new command” he has just given them (13:34) by speaking of his love for them or their responsibility to “love one another.” Instead, he speaks of love in a very traditional way, and of a plurality of “my commands,” not of a single “new command.” His language evokes the covenantal language of the Hebrew Bible, in which the people of Israel are repeatedly characterized as those who “love God” and “keep his commands.”⁷⁸ It also evokes his words in the other three Gospels about the two great commands to “love the Lord your God” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (see Mt 22:37-39//Mk 12:29-31; also Lk 10:26-27). It resonates with these more than

The Scope of Love

If love for Jesus consists of obedience, understanding the scope of love is imperative. First, this includes the command to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:12). However, although Jesus gives an order (singular) to love one another in John's Gospel (Jn 15:12 cf. 13:34), he instructs his disciples to keep his commandments (plural) as a test of their love for him (Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10). The single command focusing on the love ethic seems to point to the concept of love as the sum of the commandments. Regarding this commandment/commandments interplay, Bruce observes that "to love the Father is to love his children; to love the Son is to love his followers; for them to love one another is to love the Father and the Son."⁴²³ In such love, the keeping of the divine commandments realizes its perfection. And in such a setting of love, the first promise of the Paraclete is made."⁴²⁴

Jesus Defines Those Who Love Him

Having defined love as obedience to the commandments of Jesus, John 14:21-24 restricts those who love Jesus.⁴²⁵ Although the Father displays His love for the world through the Son, the indwelling of the Father and the Son is only for those who receive and reciprocate that love

with anything we have encountered up to now in the Gospel of John itself. But there is one enormous difference: the command is not simply to love the God of Israel, but quite specifically to "love me," and keep "my commands," presumably including - though not limited to - the "new command" to love one another. In short, Jesus stands before his disciples at this last meal in the place of God, and representing God." Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 782-783.

⁴²³ Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 301.

⁴²⁴ Ibid. Further, Harris also adds, "In vv. 15, 21, 23-24 "my commands," "my word," and "my words" are interchanged (as the obj. of *tepéw*), suggesting that the "commands" (*vtolaf*) are wider than ethical instructions and include all of Jesus' revelation from the Father." Harris, *John*, 260.

⁴²⁵ Keener also notes this by saying that keeping the commandments is evidence of love for Jesus. Keener, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2, 974.

through obedience to his commandments. At least four outstanding implications are deductible from the text.

First, only those who have and keep the commandments of Jesus love him. Whereas John 14:15 defines love as obedience to the commandments of Jesus, vv. 21 and 23 characterize and identify those who keep his commands as those who love him. Further, by this declaration, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me” (14:20), Jesus provides a litmus test for evaluating claims of love for him.⁴²⁶

Second, whereas the Father loves and intends to save the world through His Son (3:16), covenantal love is reserved for only those who respond to Him by loving the Son, which John defines as obedience to His commandments in this context. Burns calls this “the obedience-as-love guideline” with the “Father is the focus” and concludes, “He will love “obedient lovers,” and he and the Son will make their “home” (cf. *μονήν* and in 14:2) with the believer (v. 23).⁴²⁷

The love-obedience motif recaptures the Old Covenant relational framework in the OT.⁴²⁸ He extends love to all but enters into a covenantal loving relationship with only those who respond by loving him. As Burns writes, “The ones who abide in Trinitarian life are believers

⁴²⁶ Regarding the immediate context of this declaration, Searles offers the following insights: Judas’s question provides the key to understanding how these relate. Judas asks why Jesus will show himself to the disciples and not to the world. Perhaps, like Thomas, he is thinking in purely geographic terms. Jesus’s answer again reorients the question relationally. Since Jesus’s “showing himself” to the disciples is in fact by means of the Spirit coming to dwell with them, it is clear why this is for disciples only, not the whole world. Jesus’s answer, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word,” is a way of him explaining who his disciples are: those who keep his word.” Matt Searles, “These Things I Have Said To You”: An Investigation Of How Purpose Clauses Govern The Interpretation Of John 14–16,” *JETS* 60 (Sep 2017), 516.

⁴²⁷ Burns, John 14:1-27, *BSAC*, 312.

⁴²⁸ Klink explains further, “The first section of the pericope (vv. 15-21) concludes where it began, with love for Christ and obedience to his commandments. In many ways, this expected response matches well the “covenant-form” message of the farewell discourse (see comments before 13:1). As we noted earlier (see comments on v. 15), fellowship and partnership with God is a relationship of love that is expressed through obedience.” Klink III, *John*, 638.

“who have my commands and obey them” (John 14:21).⁴²⁹ Thus, “love in the family expresses obedience and is rewarded by the love of the Father.”⁴³⁰ Besides, “Christianity was designed by God to be a covenantal family—an interpersonal, reciprocal bonding of Jesus, the Father, and their people.”⁴³¹

Third, the promise of the indwelling only happens in the context of mutual Love between the Father/Son and the disciples.⁴³² In his response to Judas (not Iscariot), Jesus emphasizes this mutuality. He states, “My Father will love him who loves Me” (14:21) and “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him” (14:22). Mutual indwelling occurs within the context of this reciprocity of Love. Stated succinctly, Jesus declares, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (14:23). Love and obedience are inextricably connected since mutual Love provides a context for mutual indwelling. Stated differently, “The Father will come and dwell where he is loved, and his word is kept.”⁴³³

Fourth, Jesus characterizes and defines those who do not keep his commandments as those who do not love him (Jn 14:24). Although Michaels asserts that “the one who does not love me” is a reference to the “world”⁴³⁴ the context widens this to include all aspects of any verbal profession of love without obedience. In summary, love for Jesus and obedience to him are

⁴²⁹ Burns, John 14:1-27, *BSAC*, 311.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 481.

⁴³³ Daniel Stevick, *Jesus and His Own: A Commentary on John 13-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 161.

⁴³⁴ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 790.

indissoluble. The litmus test of true love for Him is obeying His commands. As Barclay writes, “To John there is only one test of love and that is obedience.” Further, “it was by his obedience that Jesus showed his love of God; and it is by our obedience that we must show our love of Jesus.”⁴³⁵

Obedience and Love In I John

The first epistle of John establishes a matrix of inter-relationships around the motif of obedience. Before examining these concepts, it must be reiterated that “the purpose for the writing of the First Epistle of John was to provide an objective analysis of oneself with regard to the eternal (5:13).”⁴³⁶ While “eternal life is through belief “in the name of the Son of God,”⁴³⁷ it becomes “evident through love of God and observance of His revealed commands which is manifested in the practice of righteousness.”⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ “C. K. Barrett says: “ John never allowed love to devolve into a sentiment or emotion. Its expression is always moral and is revealed in obedience.” We know all too well how there are those who protest their love in words but who, at the same time, bring pain and heartbreak to those whom they claim to love. There are children and young people who say that they love their parents, and who yet cause them grief and anxiety. There are husbands who say they love their wives and wives who say they love their husbands, and who yet, by their inconsiderate-ness and their irritability and their thoughtless unkindness bring pain the one to the other. To Jesus real love is not an easy thing. It is shown only in true obedience.” William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 166. Thompson offers a similar summary on the link between love and obedience. “Jesus explains what it means to love him: it is to keep his commands (14:15; 15:10), even as God’s people are called to love God (Deut 6:4) and keep his commandments (e.g., Deut 11:27-28; 12:28; 15:5. He further declares that those who love him will be loved by God, thus rounding out the Gospel’s assertions that God loves the world (3:16), that the Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9), and that Jesus has loved his own (13:1, 34; 15:12). Furthermore, Jesus will “reveal himself to those who love him and keep his commands.” Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 315.

⁴³⁶ Ron J. Bigalke, Jr., “Identity Of The First Epistle Of John: Context, Style, And Structure,” *JODT* 17 (Spring 2013),16.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

While “the themes of love and obedience are combined several times in John’s first epistle (1 John 2:5; 3:23; 5:2–3),⁴³⁹ the passage that connects love to obedience is 1 Jn 5:2-3, where he writes, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Notice that these two verses give “the reader a statement that consists of three parts: love for the children of God; love for God; and obedience to his commands.”⁴⁴⁰

The three separate concepts are intertwined. Thus, instead of writing, "We know that we love God when we love His children," John could also write, "We love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (v. 2). C. H. Dodd notices, "No doubt the author holds that love to God and love to man are so inseparable that the presence of either is evidence of the other."⁴⁴¹ Similarly, Kistemaker comments, "If any part of the statement is to be valid, it has to be linked to the other two parts."⁴⁴² In effect, "John states that love for God's children must be coupled with love for God to be genuine.' And love for God can be true only if we obey his laws."⁴⁴³ In a nutshell, love for God and others, as well as "obedience, is the only

⁴³⁹ John R. Yarid, Jr. “Reflections of the Upper Room Discourse in 1 John,” *BSAC* 160 (Jan 2003), 71.

⁴⁴⁰ Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, 348.

⁴⁴¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, MNTC Series (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), 125.

⁴⁴² Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, 348.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 348. Smalley shares a similar view. “Faith in Jesus as Messiah is the sign of spiritual rebirth, and this involves love for all who share such new life. The reality of that love will (and should be demonstrated by active obedience to God’s orders, and above all to the demand for love from the believer. Moreover, the love of God and the love of God’s children include each other, and the mark of true “divine sonship” is that the will of the Christian and the will of God coincide.” Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 267.

proof of love."⁴⁴⁴ Framing this according to John's logic, "to love God is to obey God's commandments, one of which is the commandment of mutual love."⁴⁴⁵

While I Jn 5:3 repeats keeping the commandments of God as an expression of love for God, John adds another important thought that God's commandments are not burdensome (lit., "heavy, difficult," *bareiai*).⁴⁴⁶ Reasons given for the ease of keeping the commandments include the empowerment of the Spirit⁴⁴⁷ and the new birth experience.⁴⁴⁸ Marshall summarizes the link between love, keeping of commandments, and Spirit-empowered ability for obedience:

We already know that love for God is expressed in keeping his commandments (2:4f.; 2 Jn. 6; cf. Jn. 14:15, 21). Now we are reminded of the fact. It is an appropriate addition, for elsewhere John has shown us that God's commandments are summed up in the command to love one another. Here, however, the thought is a bridge, leading over to the main point that these commandments-and hence the duty of loving one another- are not burdensome. They are not beyond our ability to keep. Jesus offers us an easy yoke and a light burden (Mt. 11:30. 36 If we are tempted to think that the love and obedience demanded of Christians are beyond our powers, this verse comes as a welcome source of strength and encouragement.⁴⁴⁹

Keeping the Word As a Test of Knowing Him

Jesus highlights a crucial aspect of salvation in his priestly prayer in John 17:3, where he defines eternal life "in what appears to be a parenthetical explanation."⁴⁵⁰ John 17:3 is the only place in the Johannine literature where he defines eternal life as knowing "the only true God and

⁴⁴⁴ William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 103.

⁴⁴⁵ David Rensberger, *ANTC:1 John 2 John 3 John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 127.

⁴⁴⁶ Johnson, *1, 2, AND 3 John*, 121.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ D. Moody Smith, *First Second, And Third John*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 118.

⁴⁴⁹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 228.

⁴⁵⁰ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 350.

the one sent by him, Jesus Christ. “John does not write that knowing God leads to eternal life, as if it were the reward for faith, but that knowing God, to be in communion with God, is life, because God is the source of all life (cf. Col 3:4).”⁴⁵¹ Thus, to know Him is to share His life. Thompson notes that “such a formulation lends itself to a view of salvation as participation in the divine life typical especially of the Eastern Church.”⁴⁵²

However, whereas the Gospel of John defines eternal life, 1 John provides tests to assess claims of knowing God.⁴⁵³ These tests “promote personal assurance of God’s truth and salvation and enable believers to detect and reject the false teachings assailing them.”⁴⁵⁴ Hiebert calls these tests a “series of signs.”⁴⁵⁵

Structurally, 2:3-11 begins a new section. The initial *kai* shows a close connection to the previous section. The connection is further clarified by “the continued statements of the walk of true Christians and the sustained use of the walking-in-light-and-darkness metaphor at 2:8–11.”⁴⁵⁶ The new section “contains two major paragraphs (2:3–6 and 7–11)”⁴⁵⁷ where “the sign of obedience (vv. 3–5a) and the sign of the conscious imitation of the example of Christ (vv. 5b–

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid. “Thus Clement of Alexandria expounds, “To know [the Father] is eternal life, through participation in the power of the incorrupt One. And to be incorruptible is to participate in divinity” *ibid*.

⁴⁵³ This is set in the background of fellowship with God. Hiebert observes, “John began with offering assurance through the test of fellowship grounded in the nature and revelation of God. This fellowship is grounded in the nature of God as light (1:5), is hindered by the presence and practice of sin (1:6–10), and is made possible by the redemptive work of Christ (2:1–2).” D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Expository Study of 1 John Part 3: An Exposition of 1 John 2:7-17,” *BSAC* 145 (Oct 1988), 421.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 420.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ L. Scott Kellum, “On the Semantic Structure of 1 John: A Modest Proposal,” *FM* 23 (Fall 2005), 42.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. Kelly further notes, “The first is essentially an exhortation to walk as He walked, i.e., keeping His commandments. The second paragraph is identified in the analysis below as the specific command to be obeyed. It could, however, just as easily be an appropriate illustration of keeping His commandments.” *Ibid*.

6)⁴⁵⁸ stand close to each other. These signs are further laid out in “three propositional clusters (2:3, 4–5, and 6).”⁴⁵⁹

First, he writes that “believers know God by keeping His commands.”⁴⁶⁰ To state this more forcefully, “obedience is evidence that we have come to know Him.”⁴⁶¹ The relationship between loving, knowing, and obeying God is a common motif in the Gospel of John and First John. Regarding this, Yarid makes a perceptive observation:

This is the first of twenty-three occurrences of the word γινώσκω [“know”] in 1 John.) In verse 5 he added that the one who keeps (i.e., obeys) God’s word has His love perfected in him. First John 5:3 conveys the same thought: “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” This relationship between knowing and loving God and keeping His commandments reflects Jesus’ similar instruction to His disciples in John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” This thought is continued a few verses later as Jesus assured the disciples that if they keep His commands, they will be loved by the Father (v. 21), and Jesus and the Father will come to them and abide with them (v. 23).⁴⁶²

Second, by writing that “He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn 2:4), he insists that failure to keep God’s commandments indicates that person does not know Him, regardless of claiming so. This also “alludes to John 14:24, which records Jesus’ words that the one who does not love Him does not keep His words.”⁴⁶³ As for the meaning of “know God,” Yarid’s comments below provide helpful insight. “Some understand that the concept of not knowing God refers to a non-Christian.

⁴⁵⁸ Hiebert, “An Expository Study of 1 John Part 3” *BSAC*, 420.

⁴⁵⁹ Kellum, “On the Semantic Structure of 1 John” *FM*, 42.

⁴⁶⁰ Yarid, Jr. “Reflections of the Upper Room Discourse in 1 John,” *BSAC*, 68.

⁴⁶¹ Kellum, “On the Semantic Structure of 1 John” *FM*, 42.

⁴⁶² Yarid, Jr. “Reflections of the Upper Room Discourse in 1 John,” *BSAC*, 68.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

However, since John was addressing believers, it seems preferable to view the words ‘not knowing God’ as having reference to a believer who is not walking in fellowship with the Lord. To “know God” refers to a believer’s deep, intimate knowledge of Him.”⁴⁶⁴

Third, like the Gospel, the epistle also shows that keeping God’s commandments links knowing and loving Him. To love God is to enter into deep intimacy with him, which John defines as “eternal life” (Jn 17:3). Thus, in the epistle, “whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him” (1 Jn 2:5). Yarid shares a similar view. “In John 15:10, Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” Just as Jesus kept the Father’s word and knew the Father, the disciples can know the Father’s love intimately by obeying Jesus’ words.”⁴⁶⁵ In summary, “The one who knows the truth lives according to God’s commandments, which have been revealed through the Lord Jesus and His apostles (cf. 1 John 2:3–24).”⁴⁶⁶

Keeping the Word in the Book of Revelation

As in the Gospel and the Epistles of John, the book of Revelation describes God’s children as those who keep His word. To such people, God pronounces blessings. In the quest for an epistemic justification of assurance, ‘*makarios*,’ translated as ‘blessed’⁴⁶⁷ or ‘happy,’⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. Further, on the love-knowing God-obedience connection, Yarid writes, “In His prayer to the Father, Jesus reported, “They [the disciples] have kept Your word” (17:6). Obeying God’s commands also means believers can be confident that He will answer their prayers (1 John 3:22). Obedience to the Lord’s commands also means that the believer abides in Jesus and that Jesus abides in him (v. 24). These concepts in 1 John that are related to keeping His commands—knowing God, experiencing answers to prayer, and abiding in Him—are central themes in the Upper Room Discourse.” Ibid., 60.

⁴⁶⁶ Bigalke, Jr., “Identity Of The First Epistle Of John” *JODT*, 15.

⁴⁶⁷ NIV, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASB.

⁴⁶⁸ Good News Translation, Young’s Literal Translation.

furnishes further identification marks of God’s children. Blessed is the uniform translation of two Greek words, *makarios* and *eulogētos*. The first, in classical Greek, meant ‘prosperous.’ Brought into the New Testament, it means ‘spiritually prosperous.’ In its verb form, the second means “to speak well of, to praise, extol.”⁴⁶⁹

Beatitudes have unique characteristics in Scripture. As an adjective, it limits the experience of the blessed ones to only a particular category of people. They often describe people who are in a prosperous relationship with God. Brian K. Blount classifies beatitudes as either wisdom or apocalyptic and argues that "both modes (wisdom and apocalyptic) recognize that the person who seeks to do God's will is blessed."⁴⁷⁰ Further, he writes,

In that sense they have both indicative and imperative potential. As an indicative statement, the macarism describes the participant who is in right relationship with God. There are also clear indications, however, that *makarios* formulations have an imperative sense. As the Dan 12:12-13 passage demonstrates, the person who performs a particular activity is considered blessed and is subsequently rewarded. By envisioning a proleptic reward, the macarism encourages what is considered to be positive, “salvific” behavior.⁴⁷¹

What is essential about beatitudes in this dissertation is how they provide identifying marks of people in a saving or covenantal relationship with God. For instance, in Psalm 1, the blessed person (1) walks not in the counsel of the ungodly (2) nor stands in the path of sinners (3) Nor sits in the seat of the scornful. Positively, such a person (4) delights in the law of the Lord and (5) meditates day and night in the law of the law.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ Kenneth S. Wuest, “Prepositions and Synonyms in Greek Exposition Part III,” *BSAC* 467 (Jul 1960), 239.

⁴⁷⁰ Brian K. Blount, *NLT: Revelation, A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 31.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² Psalms 1:1-2.

Like Psalm 1, in Isaiah 56, the blessed person (1) lays hold on God's covenant, (2) keeps from defiling the Sabbath, (3) keeps his hand from doing any evil. Isaiah 56 extends blessings to eunuchs (4) who keep God's Sabbaths, (5) choose what pleases Him, and (6) hold fast to His covenant. Foreigners who become recipients of God's blessings when they (7) join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, (8) love the name of the Lord, to be His servants— (9) keeps from defiling the Sabbath, (10) and holds fast Yahweh's covenant.⁴⁷³ Isaiah writes that these characterize those who set themselves to wait for God's eschatological kingdom.⁴⁷⁴

Similarly, in the NT, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew defines the characteristics of the citizens of His kingdom. Garlington describes it as “the life of the blessed future (promised in 5:3–12).”⁴⁷⁵ The blessed are (1) the poor in spirit, (2) those who mourn, (4) the meek, (5) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, (6) the merciful, (7) the pure in heart, (8) the peacemakers (9) those who are persecuted for righteousness sake (10) those reviled and persecuted and spoken against falsely for the sake of Christ.⁴⁷⁶ In conclusion, Jesus clarified that the blessed, categorized by the descriptions above, must rejoice and be exceedingly glad for their great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12).

John follows a similar pattern in Revelation. In the book, *makarios* defines (1) those who read⁴⁷⁷ and hear and keep the words of the prophecy (Rev. 1:3), (2) the dead who died in the Lord (Rev. 14:13), (3) those who watch and keep their garment (4), those called into the

⁴⁷³ Isaiah 56:1-6.

⁴⁷⁴ See J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 395.

⁴⁷⁵ Don Garlington, “The “Better Righteousness”: Matthew 5:20,” *BBR* 20 (NA 2010), 480.

⁴⁷⁶ Matthew 5:3-11.

⁴⁷⁷ This means “reads aloud.” Leon Morris, *Revelation*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987), 46.

marriage supper (Rev. 19:9), (5) those who have a part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6) (6) the keepers of the sayings of the book (Rev. 22:7,) and (7) they that do his commandments/wash their robes (Rev. 22:14). "As would be expected, all seven "blessings" are for those who comply with this book's high standards of righteousness. They either declare their blessed estate in an absolute way (1 :3; 14:13; 16:15; 22:7) or elaborate on their blessing by way of a rich promise for the future (19:9; 20:6; 22:14)."⁴⁷⁸

Hearing and *heeding* express the expectation of an obedient response from the reader. Beale suggests that "hearing" and "keeping" may be hendiadys emphasizing obedience.⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, Fee says that "those who hear and keep what is written in it" is "John's version of being both "hearers and doers of the Word."⁴⁸⁰ Thus, for Barclay, the men who keep these words are blessed.⁴⁸¹ Kistemaker points to the evidential nature of the text in the following remarks:

Through these words of prophecy, God's messengers call people to a life of obedience and love for him. They are those who are the hearers of the words that are read; they must put these words into deeds to demonstrate that they are indeed children of God and followers of Jesus. They must keep these written words that never lose their power and authority.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 62.

⁴⁷⁹ G. K. Beale, *NIGNTC: The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 184.

⁴⁸⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation, A New Covenant Commentary*, NCCS (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2013) 27 (Electronic Version).

⁴⁸¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 26. Barclay contends that "To hear God's word is a privilege; to obey it is a duty." Further, he deduces that "There is no real Christianity in the man who hears and forgets or deliberately disregards." Ibid.

⁴⁸² Simon J. Kistemaker, *NTC: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 79.

The book of Revelation links the concepts of blessings and obedience together and presents them as the book's ultimate purpose.⁴⁸³ For Beale, "the book has an ultimate ethical aim."⁴⁸⁴ Roloff comes to a similar conclusion. "With the reading and attentive hearing of John's prophecy," he writes, "we reach the last part of the arch that the foreword lays out, which spans from Revelation's origin to its goal. Indeed, everything depends on the message of this book being faithfully kept by its hearers."⁴⁸⁵ Roloff continues, "A twofold meaning seems to be suggested: first, the prophecy must be protected from threatening falsifications (22:18-19); second, its hearers must adhere to all its demands (3:3, 8, 10, 12:17; 14:12)."⁴⁸⁶ In summary, keeping the words and instructions revealed in the book of Revelation is the book's ultimate goal. Further, the children of God are characterized as those who hear and heed the words. Such people are also considered blessed. Blessing, in this context, describes one in the right relationship with God.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ Beale draws readers attention to the true purpose of the book of Revelation. He writes, "The message of Revelation, as it unfolds, is not designed to provide fodder for intellectual speculation about the end times but is rather a series of commands addressed to the present-day lives of all who read it. Prophecy in the OT generally had two time references: it was a forth-telling of God's word for His people in the present, and a foretelling of events to happen in the future. Revelation maintains these two features of prophecy." G. K. Beale with David H. Campbell, *Revelation, A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 52. Electronic Version.

⁴⁸⁴ According to Beale, this comes out in "the conclusion in 22:6-21, which is an intentional expansion of the prologue in 1:1-3, and especially of the ethical emphasis of 1:3." Further he observes that "The prophecy of v. 3 is not a set of predictions but, in the biblical tradition, a word from God calling for an obedient response in the lives of believers." *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John, A Continental Commentary*, Trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21.

⁴⁸⁶ Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John, A Continental Commentary*, Trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21

⁴⁸⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation*, 31.

The Sixth Beatitude

The sixth Beatitude extends throughout the book of Revelation and climaxes in the seventh Beatitude. However, the sixth Beatitude, “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7) “serves as a further *inclusio* with the content of the opening beatitude in 1:3.”⁴⁸⁸ In addition to making a similar observation that “the sixth beatitude repeats in abbreviated form the words of the first beatitude,” Kistemaker also notes “an obvious connection between the one who keeps and the one who heeds.”⁴⁸⁹ Thus, John reemphasizes keeping the words of the book.

Whereas in Rev. 1:3, the blessing was for those who hear the words of this prophecy and heed what is written in it, in Rev. 22:7, it is for those who keep the words of the prophecy in this scroll. The crucial verb here, “*tērōn*” “translates a participial form of the verb *tērēo*, which means “to keep, “to hold fast,” or “to guard.”⁴⁹⁰ Fees note that although the verb could mean either “preserve” or “live in obedience to” them, most likely, John’s concern is the latter.⁴⁹¹ Aside from recapping obedience to the words, the text also underscores the importance of continuous obedience. As noted above, “the Greek text has a present participle in “the one who is keeping” to indicate the continuing task of voluntarily and joyfully obeying the divine words written in this book.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ Fee, *Revelation*, 339.

⁴⁸⁹ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 586.

⁴⁹⁰ MacArthur, *MNTC: Revelation 12-22*, 294.

⁴⁹¹ Fee, *Revelation*, 339.

⁴⁹² Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 586. In addition to living in obedience to the word, the idea of “guarding” or “preserving” the text is not entirely absent. MacArthur writes, “Believers are called to guard or protect the book of Revelation. It must be defended against detractors who deny its relevance, against critics who deny its veracity and authority, as well as against confused interpreters who obscure its meaning. In fact, all of Scripture is to be so guarded. Paul commanded Timothy, “Guard what has been entrusted to you. .. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard,

The sixth beatitude repeats the book's goal: "God's true people would obey its revelation and be blessed with salvation."⁴⁹³ This goal stresses the ethical component of the book. Roloff notices that "at the book's conclusion after it has been read and heard," experiencing the Beatitudes "depends only on one thing that everyone holds fast to what has been heard and allows it to guide their conduct."⁴⁹⁴

Characteristics of God's End Time People: Revelation 12:17

Of all the descriptors of the external identifiers of God's people, Revelation 12:17 is among the clearest. Here they are characterized as the ones "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17, NKJV). The context describes four temporal stages in the church's history, beginning from the time of Christ. Beale outlines the four stages as "(1) the messianic community before Christ (vv. 1-4), (2) the appearance of Christ in the covenant community (v 5), (3) the persecuted messianic community immediately following Christ's ascension (vv. 6, 13-16), and (4) the later stages of the persecuted community (v 17)."⁴⁹⁵ The final stage, describes "an era at the very end of history."⁴⁹⁶

through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14)." MacArthur, MNTC: Revelation 12-22, 294.

⁴⁹³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGNTC, 1127. Beale also adds, "He who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book will be blessed, a repetition of the similar statement in 1:3, so that "blessing" roughly brackets the book. This suggests that the goal of the book is that God's true people obey its revelation and be blessed with salvation. The words referred to in vv. 6 and 7b form a bracket around blessed to underscore it as the book's goal. The blessing is the bestowal of salvation itself, as is evident from the use of "blessed" (Greek *makarios*) in 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; and 22:14." Beale with Campbell, *Revelation*, 548.

⁴⁹⁴ Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 250. For a similar view, see Blount, *Revelation*, 403.

⁴⁹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 678.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

Leon Morris identifies those who obey God's commandments and hold on to the testimony of Jesus as "all Christians."⁴⁹⁷ Morris is right since genuine Christians are faithful, and God's faithful children keep his commandments.⁴⁹⁸ Kistemaker holds a similar view when he writes that "The rest of her offspring" points to the church as a whole, which remains intact until the return of Christ.⁴⁹⁹

The word translated as a 'commandment,' *entolas*, "is a word used frequently in John's writings to refer to New Testament commands (e.g., 14:12; John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12; 1 John 2:3-4; 3:22-24; 5:2-3)."⁵⁰⁰ Positing God's commandments at the heart of the conflict means that the eschatological battle is "moral, not ontological."⁵⁰¹ In other words, "in the midst of a world governed by disobedience to God, they stand up for the will of God in unconditional obedience."⁵⁰²

Apart from keeping the commandments of God, God's end-time people also have the testimony of Jesus. Beale observes that this phrase is "intentionally ambiguous."⁵⁰³ The Greek phrase "can be interpreted as an objective or a subjective genitive. In other words, it may be understood as the testimony about Jesus (Jesus is, accordingly, the object of Christians' witness) or the testimony which Christ himself bears through those who have the gift of prophecy (for

⁴⁹⁷ Morris, *Revelation*, 160.

⁴⁹⁸ Wilfred J. Harrington, O. P. *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. (Collegedale, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 135.

⁴⁹⁹ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 370.

⁵⁰⁰ MacArthur, *MNTC: Revelation 12-22*, 34.

⁵⁰¹ Leonard L. Thompson, *ANTC: Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 137.

⁵⁰² Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 152.

⁵⁰³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 679.

instance, through John himself)."⁵⁰⁴ Roloff understands this as holding "the testimony of Jesus" (cf. 1:9; 6:9; 12:11; 20:4)."⁵⁰⁵ Stefanovic, likewise argues that this expression refers to Jesus' "self-revelation to the church."⁵⁰⁶ In either case, "faithfully and obediently," God's end-time people will "continue to keep the teachings of God's Word."⁵⁰⁷

Characteristics of God's End Time People: Revelation 14:12

The related text in Rev. 14:12 reinforces John's point that God's universal end time people will keep His commandments and have the faith of Jesus. Beale connects saving faith and obedience in the context of Rev. 12:17 and 14:12 by remarking that "Faith is defined in 14:12 as 'keeping the commandments of God and the faith in Jesus,' which is almost identical to the description of persecuted Christians in 12:17b: 'those who keep the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus.'"⁵⁰⁸ He continues that "the

⁵⁰⁴ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 392.

⁵⁰⁵ Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 152.

⁵⁰⁶ Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 393. For Stefanovic's basis for his position, see the comments below: Revelation 19:10 further defines "the testimony of Jesus" as "the spirit of prophecy" (cf. Rev. 22:9). The role of the prophets in the New Testament is to bear the testimony of Jesus to his people. Thus, "the testimony of Jesus" in Revelation does not refer to the contents of the book of Revelation, which are clearly identified throughout the book as "the words of the prophecy" (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19) consisting of "the things that John saw, that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:2). Neither does the phrase refer to the church's witness concerning Christ, for in the book the church's witness is always referred to as "the testimony" (cf. Rev. 6:9) or "their testimony" (11:7; 12:11; see further Notes on Rev. 6:9). It appears that the expression "the testimony of Jesus" refers either to "the testimony born by Jesus Himself" in his own ministry while he was in the flesh, or to his self-revelation to the church "by the working of the Holy Spirit through inspiring his servants the prophets. The prophets in the New Testament are the bearers of Christ's revelation. It is because of his faithful testimony to "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (cf. Rev. 1:2) that John was exiled to Patmos (1:9). Revelation 12:17 indicates that the prophetic revelation did not die with John, for God's end-time people will be in possession of the prophetic gift (cf. Rev. 19:10)." Ibid., 393.

⁵⁰⁷ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 370.

⁵⁰⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 766.

commandments of God" is a holistic reference to the objective revelation of the old and new covenants, to which the faithful remain loyal."⁵⁰⁹

In sum, obedience to God's commandments and their faithfulness to Jesus, a disposition that characterizes God's eschatological people, implies "both ethical conduct and reliance on the Saviour."⁵¹⁰ These are characteristics all genuine Christians (saints) share.⁵¹¹ In this context, the saints are those who "keep" God's commandments by living out the faith of God's Lamb.⁵¹²

Test Four: Overcomers Test

The concept of overcoming offers one of the significant epistemological validations of assurance of salvation in the Johannine literature. According to Walther Gunther, the Greek verb *nikao* expresses "visible superiority in the natural rivalry that takes place among men. But it is also applied to the realm of the gods. It can be translated surpass, overcome, be stronger. It presupposes achievement in physical or spiritual battle."⁵¹³

Overcoming in the Gospel of John

Although the Greek word *kōsmos* does not always have a negative connotation in the Johannine literature, in the context of John 16:33, it represents all that stands in opposition to

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Morris, *Revelation*, 177. For a similar view see Thompson, *Revelation*, 147.

⁵¹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 678.

⁵¹² Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 277.

⁵¹³ W. Gunther, *NIDNTT*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1.650.

God. More specifically, the “world infallibly means tribulation.”⁵¹⁴ As Rainbow remarks, “Though created by God, the world, then, has become alienated from him and rages against him. Under “the ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), it forms a system that lies prone in evil (1 Jn 5:19).”⁵¹⁵ Under the sway of the devil who employs the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life as weapons against believers, the world becomes his primary ally. In this sense, “God and the world in this sense are antagonists.”⁵¹⁶

The antagonistic relationship plays out in hatred and persecution. “The world hates the light (Jn 3:20), therefore it hates Jesus (Jn 7:7; 15:18, 23-25) and his disciples (Jn 15:18-19; 17:14; 1 Jn 3:13). In hating them it hates the Father (Jn 15:23).”⁵¹⁷ Yet, despite its hatred, Christ promises the disciples that he has overcome the world (John 16:33). “The tense of the verb, ‘I have overcome,’ a perfect, lays stress on the abiding character of the victory.”⁵¹⁸ Thus, Christ’s abiding victory over the world provides a haven for the disciples to exercise peace in him and fearlessness over a defeated foe.

Overcoming in the Epistles of John

The first epistle of John presents three formidable foes confronting believers, namely, the wicked one (1 Jn 2:13, 14), the false prophets (1 Jn 4:1-4), and the world (1 Jn 5:4, 5). The first

⁵¹⁴ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Trials and Triumphs Through the Triumphant Christ,” *EMJ* 1 (Summer 1998), 59.

⁵¹⁵ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 126.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ Johnson, Jr., *Trials and Triumphs*, *EMJ*, 59.

foe, designated as *ponēros* and translated variously as the “evil one”⁵¹⁹ or “wicked one,”⁵²⁰ points to the devil. Behind the false prophets and the deadly allurements of the world hides this real and persistent enemy with his nefarious cohorts.⁵²¹ Thus “John recognized that they had overcome, not temptation, but the Tempter, “the evil one.”⁵²² Outside 1 John, the word occurs only in Matthew 13, where he takes the good seeds from the hearts of some hearers of the gospel (Matt. 13:19) and is designated as the father whose children represent the tares (Matt. 13:38). The term “evil/wicked one” itself “depicts his nature as vicious, injurious, and destructive. It describes him as utterly bad.”⁵²³

Since “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), he wields the world as a tool to further his warfare against believers. The world presents the “lust of the flesh,” “lust of the eyes,” and “pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16) in their most attractive light to seduce believers from their love for the Father. With regards to the meaning of κόσμος in this context, Hiebert writes that the world

basically, denotes order, arrangement (the opposite of chaos), and hence an orderly system. It could be used to denote the earth (John 21:25), or the world of mankind (John 3:16) in its various organizations and systems. But because of the fallen nature of the human race, the term predominantly has an ethical import, the human race in its alienation from and opposition to God. John here had in view the world of humanity in its rebellion against God and dominated by the evil one (1 John 5:19).⁵²⁴

⁵¹⁹ NIV, ESV, NLT, NASB.

⁵²⁰ KJV, NKJV.

⁵²¹ Hiebert, *An Expository Study of 1 John*, 430.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 433.

Lust of the Flesh

The word *epithymia* may be good or bad⁵²⁵, depending on the context. In a neutral sense, Hiebert is correct that “the cravings God has placed in the human body in themselves are not sinful but readily become sinful when used for illegitimate ends.”⁵²⁶ Like *epithymia*, the word *sarx*, translated as “flesh,” could also be good or bad. “In the present context John is speaking of the bodily appetites of people that are absolutely wholesome in themselves, whether it is an appetite for food or drink or sex. When these appetites are satisfied according to “the will of God” (v. 17), they give wholesome and innocent pleasure.”⁵²⁷ However, Macleod aptly notes that “when we desire to fulfill our appetites outside of the “will of God” (gluttony, drunkenness, illicit sex), then the desire is “lust,” the sin of our sinful souls.”⁵²⁸

Lust of the eyes

Since fulfilling desires in harmony with God’s will is not sinful, the “lust of the eyes” in this context must refer to things outside God’s approval. Macleod provides a summary of three possible interpretations. Firstly, “the lust of the eyes” refers to the desire to watch things that give sinful pleasure.”⁵²⁹ Secondly, for some people, this represents the “tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things without inquiring into their real values.”⁵³⁰ Thirdly,

⁵²⁵ “It is thrice used in the New Testament with a good meaning (Luke 22:15; Phil 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:17). Ibid., 434. In 1 Thess. 2:17, Paul uses the word to express his “intense longing” to see his readers. See David J. MacLeod, “The Love That God Hates,” *EMJ* 1 (Summer 1995), 11.

⁵²⁶ Hiebert, *An Expository Study of 1 John*, 434.

⁵²⁷ MacLeod, *The Love That God Hates*, 12.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 14. Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1890), 52; Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 79.

⁵³⁰ MacLeod, *The Love That God Hates*, 13.

some see “that the basic thought is of greed and desire for things that is aroused by seeing them.”⁵³¹

The Pride of Life

The pride of life or the lure for glory, prestige, power, or status is the last tool the devil wields. These constitute the “pride in one’s lifestyle”⁵³² or “a pride which belongs to or derives from one’s possessions.”⁵³³ Macleod highlights the outwardness of pride by comparing *zōē* and *bios*. He writes, “There are two words for life in the New Testament. One (ζωή, *zōē*) refers to life as a vital, internal, natural force. The other, the one used here (βίος, *bios*), speaks of life in its external aspect, i.e., the duration or manner of life (1 Tim. 2:2), or the means of life, livelihood, possessions (1 John 3:17; Mark 12:44).”⁵³⁴

As a rationale for the injunctions above, John writes that the world its lusts are passing away (1 Jn 2:17). “The verb translated “is passing away” (παράγεται, *paragetai*, pres. Mid.) is an interesting one in the original text. The tense (present) suggests that the process has actually started. Its voice (middle) suggests that the world is destroying itself.”⁵³⁵ In contrast, “he who does the will of God abides forever” (1Jn 2:17). “But” (δὲ) points to a contrasting reality: “the one who does the will of God abides forever.” This assurance is for “the one who does the will of

⁵³¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵³² Smalley, 1, 2, 3 *John*, 84

⁵³³ MacLeod, *The Love That God Hates*, 15.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 17.

God” (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ), who sets himself to be obedient to God’s will rather than pursuing the fleeting lusts of the world.”⁵³⁶

Despite the seductions, those who are “born of God” (I Jn 5:4) and believe that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jn 5:5) overcome the world. This group includes fathers, young men, and John’s affectionate term for believers, children (1 Jn 2:13). John says all Christians are born of God and overcomers. His use of the perfect tense “have overcome” (1 Jn 2:13, 4) “does not mean that the battle is already over but rather, having encountered the enemy, they now stand as assured of victory.”⁵³⁷ Moreover, “knowing that in Christ the devil is a defeated foe (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), they have in faith resisted the devil and put him to flight (1 Pet 5:9; James 4:7). Such a position of victory must be maintained daily with a firm faith in Christ and resolute striving against the devil and his temptations.”⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ Hiebert, *An Expository Study of 1 John*, 435.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.* Rosscup provides additional insightful remarks. “The overall concept in 1 John gives one confidence that John thinks of all who are born of God as overcomers. Real obedience can assure one that he indeed knows Christ (2:4). A person who hates a brother in that pervasive, continuing pattern that John’s present tense embraces in a sweep is not a bona fide Christian. He never was, for John carefully tells us that he “is in darkness until now [or even now, i.e., he is still there]” (2:9). John does not say that he is in darkness in some particular experience of the moment only. Later, not only some of the saved but “every one” who has his hope in Christ purifies himself as Christ is pure (3:3; cf. Titus 2:11ff). He does that in the dynamic of faith which overcomes (5:4, 5), enabled by the One within him (4:4b). Faith sets the desire at work within him to be like his Savior. At the same time, “anyone” who does not practice righteousness in the present tense way is not of God (3:10). John insists that in “every one” who is a Christian there will emerge distinct characteristics of an authentically overcoming life. These are characteristics such as obedience, loving a brother, purifying the life, practicing righteousness, and being kept from the evil one (cf. 5:18). The frequent present tense suggests an overall trend of life. This is not a set, static mold but dynamic. It allows for growth; it does not denote absolute, sinless perfection now! In fact, while John insists on marks of a Christian life-style for one who has eternal life, and even boldly claims that one who is born of God does not sin, he is aware that acts of sin can break into the experience of real Christians (1:9, 2:1, aorist tense twice; 3:3, implied possibility). But, while aggressive for a godly lifestyle, he shows that God in Christ has graciously made provision to forgive and cleanse sin when the one born of God does falter (1:7, 9; 2:1, 2).” James E. Rosscup, “The Overcomer of the Apocalypse,” *GTJ* 2 (Fall 1982), 266-267.

Overcoming in The Book of Revelation

Overcoming is a big theme in the Book of Revelation. First it presents Jesus as the overcomer. When John was weeping because he found no one worthy to open the scrolls, John was informed that “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” Rev. 5:5 “The aorist verb *enikēsen* is emphatic: This Lion is worthy because he has indeed “triumphed.”⁵³⁹

There is a similarity in the use of *nikaō* in both the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. The bold declaration “I have overcome [νενίκηκα] the world” (Jn 16:33) uses the vocabulary of victory achieved.”⁵⁴⁰ Likewise, in Revelation, “John returns to his distinctive language of Jesus “overcoming” (νικᾶν) and expands it into a theme.”⁵⁴¹ Rainbow summarizes the theme below:

The one who died and is alive (Apoc 1:18) states that he himself “conquered” (ἐνίκησα, /historic aorist tense) and sat down with his Father on his throne (Apoc 3:21). An angelic elder informs the seer, “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered” (ἐνίκησεν [Apoc 5:5]). . . . Though the dragon is already defeated, God has given him a little time to practice perfidy (Apoc 12:12-17) before the Lamb “will conquer” (νικήσει [Apoc 17:14])⁵⁴²

Like John 16:33, the saints share the Lamb’s victory through faith which unites them with the Lamb. Thus, John writes that “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death”(Rev 12:11). Although it is through the Lamb that the saints overcome (Rev 12:11) the connection between the Lamb’s

⁵³⁹ Stephen L. Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes”: A Fresh Look At What “Victory” Means For The Believer According To The Book Of Revelation,” *JETS*, 2 (Jun 1995), 197.

⁵⁴⁰ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 214.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

victory and the call of the followers of the Lamb to overcome needs further clarification. Whereas the Lamb's victory is a completed action in the past, the call to the churches to overcome is a present reality.

In the message to the seven churches, all the promises are contingent on overcoming: Overcomers will be given the tree of life in the paradise of God to eat (Rev. 2:7); shall not be hurt of the second death (Rev. 2:11); will be given the hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receives it (Rev. 2:17); will be given power over the nations: (Rev. 2:26); shall be clothed in white raiment and be given a name not to be blot out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5); will be made a pillar in the temple of God, shall go no more out: and will be written upon them the name of God, and the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God (Rev. 3:12); and will also be granted to sit with the lamb on his throne. (Rev. 3:21). In conclusion to the book, these promises are summarized once more in verse, "He that overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." (Rev. 21:7).

John uses the present active participle of *nikaō* seven times in Rev 2-3 in the final challenge to all the seven churches: Ephesus (2:7), Smyrna (2:11), Pergamos (2:17), Thyatira (2:26), Sardis (3:5), Philadelphia (3:12) and Laodicea (3:21). MacArthur notes that this "promise, as are those associated with the other six letters (cf. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), is addressed to him who overcomes."⁵⁴³ However, the seventh and eighth use of *nikaō* both occur in the appeal to Laodicea, where the victory of Christ contrasts the entreaty to Laodicea. "To him who overcomes (*present active participle*) I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame (*aorist active indicative*) and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

⁵⁴³ MacArthur, *MNTC: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 64-65.

In light of the distinction above, the victory of the Lamb and the victory of the believers must not be conflated. Whereas the Lamb overcame (aorist active participle), the churches are admonished to overcome (present reality). Kistemaker perceptively notes the difference. He writes that “a key word in this sentence is the expression overcome, which in the Greek is the present participle “the overcoming one.” This is not a past or perfect tense as a completed action but current and continuous performance.”⁵⁴⁴ Thus, for the churches, although Christ has won the battle “the war is not over yet.”⁵⁴⁵ Similarly, for Homcy, “the book of Revelation was not written simply to inform believers about the victory of the Lamb.”⁵⁴⁶ More than that, the book is a “prophetic exhortation for his followers to triumph in him. In summary,

Eschatological benefits were promised to those who have conquered with the hope that anticipated future reward would encourage present witness. Now it is God's turn to address the potential conqueror. God, too, points to the future as an inducement for appropriate witnessing behavior in the present. The one who conquers will inherit “these things,” which in this context refers back to all of the eschatological benefits thus far associated with life in the new Jerusalem (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6).⁵⁴⁷

The Identity of Overcomers

There is no unanimity on the description of the identity of overcomers in Revelation. Representing one position, Wilkins argues that although overcoming is possible through the blood of Christ (Rev 12:11), “Only believers walking in the light actually do overcome by means of the blood of Christ.”⁵⁴⁸ He further appeals to Revelation 2-3 to contend that “not all believers

⁵⁴⁴ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 118.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Homcy, *To Him Who Overcomes*, *JETS*, 197.

⁵⁴⁷ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 382.

⁵⁴⁸ Robert N. Wilkin, “Benefits Of Christ’s Blood: Restricted And Unrestricted?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 22 (Autumn 2009), 9.

are overcomers.”⁵⁴⁹ A second view identifies the overcomers with martyrs.⁵⁵⁰ Against Wilkin’s, Kistemaker argues persuasively that “not only the martyrs but every believer is personally engaged in this war against Satan and his cohorts. Therefore, every follower of Christ receives the promise of eternal life and all the other promises he grants the believer (2:10, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). All these promises are given to the overcomer, every true believer.”⁵⁵¹

Similarly, unlike those who conceive this as a reference to a particular class of believers, or martyrs, Wong contends that “the connection between the hearing formula (3:13) and the promise to the overcomers (3:12) shows that an overcomer who receives the reward is one who hears and obeys what the Spirit says to the churches. This characteristic of hearing and obeying, of course, is not limited to a special group of saved individuals; it is true of all believers.”⁵⁵² Wong’s conclusion harmonizes with the evidence from Revelation 21:7, where the inheritance of all things is promised to only overcomers. Besides, the “book nowhere identifies any saved who enter into any kind of ultimate blessing except those naturally understood as overcomers, who are marked by obedience to the Word of God (as 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 13:8; 14:9–12; 22:7, 9, 11).”⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. Wilkin repeats this towards the end of his article. “While all believers are capable of being victorious Christians because of the blood of Christ, that is not to say that all Christians do overcome. The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible. But only believers who walk in the light of God’s Word actually do overcome.” Ibid., 10.

⁵⁵⁰ Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (Moffatt NTC; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 42, 63.

⁵⁵¹ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 118-119.

⁵⁵² Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21,” *BSAC* 156 (Jul 1999), 303. Wong furnishes additional reasons. For throughout the Apocalypse, obedience to God’s Word marks all who are genuinely born again (1:3, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 14:12; 20:4; 22:7, 9, 11).¹⁸ Elsewhere in John’s writings, the person who does not obey God’s Word is not a Christian (1 John 2:4; 2 John 9). By contrast, the genuine “sheep” hear and follow Christ in an ongoing way (John 10:27–28; cf. 1 John 2:3, 5; 3:22–24; 5:2–3; 2 John 9). Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Rosscup, *The Overcomer of the Apocalypse*, 267. “Take, for instance, this claim: many who are saved do not, in fact, overcome. Evaluation: If we do not decide by rare cases like death-bed converts or the thief on the cross, we may still acknowledge that *every* saved person with normal time and opportunity fails to overcome some or many times in his life-span following his new birth. All fall short of absolute, sinless perfection. Still, the real

In light of the above reasons, the evidence points to the direction that overcomers in the Johannine literature refer to all believers. Having established that overcomers are believers, we now turn to whether the promises given to overcomers refer to rewards or the totality of salvation.

The Case for Eternal Life

The first promise to overcomers is the right to eat from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7). In the book, *The Race Set Before Us, A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance*, Schreiner & Caneday cite this text as part of the conditional promises for salvation.⁵⁵⁴ The tree of life is first mentioned in the creation account of Genesis (Gen. 2:9), which refers to a literal tree. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God drove them out of the Garden of Eden and barred access to the Tree of Life with flaming swords (Gen. 3:22, 24). The phrase is used metaphorically in the Book of Proverbs as a metaphor for wisdom (Prov. 3:18), the fruit of the righteous (Prov. 11:30), and desire (Prov. 13:12).

point is that the Bible by its terminology describes the saved person as belonging within a general class of people. He follows in the direction of faith toward God in the thrust of his life. Christ's words embrace *all* the saved, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me..." (John 10:27). Admittedly, these sheep are inconsistent. At times they wander, follow at a strained distance, or temporarily go in the opposite direction from God's will, as in Ps 119:176. Jonah is a further example. Yet Jesus did not hesitate to define his people, *all* of them, as those who "hear" and "follow." These words in the present tense look at more than the initial act of faith alone. They do look at this, to be sure, but also survey the sweep of their lives, the basic direction and bent of character and action. The sheep persist despite failures along life's trail. Some true followers of Christ may overcome to a lesser degree than others, but all fit within the panorama of Jesus' words." *Ibid.*, 268.

⁵⁵⁴ Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 11-12. "First certain passages reflect the gospel's announcement of conditional promises as it calls for us to receive salvation in Christ. God promises to give salvation to everyone who believes the gospel by following Jesus Christ. That is, the gospel calls for initial belief ("Believe Lord Jesus come on and you will be saved - you and your household," Acts 16:31), But it also summons all who believe to persevere in belief. Here we offer the conditional promises from the latest to the seven churches in Revelation: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to each from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7); "He who has an ear come on let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death" (Rev. 2:11); and "He who overcomes who, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but who acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Rev 3:5) *ibid.*

As Adam and his posterity were barred from accessing the Tree of Life, the message to the church of Ephesus promises that overcomers will be granted access. This reversal recalls and reverses the story of Genesis, where access was barred.⁵⁵⁵ “By guarding that tree, God prevented our forebears from eating the fruit of the tree of life and thus living eternally in the unredeemable state in which the fallen angels exist. The redemption of his people, which Jesus Christ brings to completion at the consummation, includes the promise that everyone who overcomes will eat from the tree of life in paradise (Rev. 22:2, 14, 19).”⁵⁵⁶

Second, the message to the church in Smyrna promises that “The second death shall not hurt him who overcomes” (Rev. 2:11). Revelation further identifies the people who shall escape the second death as those who will have a part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6). Everyone who experiences the second death perishes. Thus, the promise is nothing less than eternal salvation for all believers. Writing against the position that the pledge for overcoming refers to rewards instead of eternal life, Schreiner & Caneday refer to the message to the church of Smyrna to argue their position.

Each of the seven letters in Revelation concludes with an exhortation to overcome. Those who overcome will receive a reward. But what is the reward for overcomers? We would argue that it is eternal life itself. Two texts show this plainly. Revelation 2:11 says, “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death” (NIV). The implication is that those who do not overcome will be hurt by the second death, which is clearly identified in Revelation 20:14 as the lake of fire. Thus, the second death is hell itself, and in order to escape the second death one must overcome, according to Revelation 2:11.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Regarding location, just as the tree of life was in the “midst of the garden” of Eden (Gen. 2:9), this is also located “in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Rev. 2:7). Revelation 22:2 places it “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river.” (Rev. 22:2) Access to the tree of life is also contingent on doing His commandments/washing robes in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 22:14).

⁵⁵⁶ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 119.

⁵⁵⁷ Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 11-12.

In addition to the above, Schreiner & Caneday also appeal to the “crown of life” promise (Rev 2:10) and the conclusion to the letter to Sardis to strengthen their view. They write,

At the conclusion of the letter to Sardis, Jesus says, "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Rev 3:5 NIV). Those who acknowledge Jesus will be acknowledged before the Father, according to Revelation 3:5. Matthew 10:32-33 makes the same statement and adds that those who deny Jesus will be denied by Jesus before the Father. We conclude, then, that to be acknowledged by Jesus is to enter the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1-22:5). By implication those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus and fail to overcome will be judged in the lake of fire. From these two overcomer texts it seems fair to conclude that the reward in view in every overcomer text is eternal life itself. Thus, the crown of life in Revelation 2:10 is not a reward above and beyond eternal life; it is eternal life itself.⁵⁵⁸

John summarizes all the promises given to overcomers in Revelation when he writes that "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Rev. 21:7). Kistemaker shares that this "text looks at the present reality of God's people living for him in a world of sin and oppression. They know Christ has won the battle, but the war has not yet ended. Every believer must fight against sin, the devil, and the world daily."⁵⁵⁹ Further, “everyone who follows Christ receives the promise of eternal life and inherits all the good things that are coming (compare Heb. 10:1).”⁵⁶⁰

Beyond the arguments presented above, there is one more potent argument to buttress the claim that overcoming refers to ultimate salvation and all its associated benefits. This is the contrast between overcomers and non-overcomers in Revelation 21:7-8. Overcomers contrast with non-overcomers who are identified as “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers,

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁵⁹ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 560.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.” (Rev. 21:8)⁵⁶¹. Further, whereas overcomers “inherit all things” and enjoy new status as God’s sons (Rev. 21:7), the final destination of non-overcomers is “the lake which burns with fire and brimstone,” and their ultimate fate is “the second death.” (Rev. 21:8). Beale provides an excellent insight:

The use of *nikōn* in 21:7 bears out this more general reference to all believers, because it is used of inheriting the blessings of salvation, in which all believers partake (cf. 21:3-7, 22-26; 22:1-5), and because of the contrast in 21:8 with all unbelievers (cf. likewise the broader contrast throughout 21:1-22:5, 11-19). All the promises to the overcomer in the letters pertain to the salvific blessing of communion with God, which provides all the essentials of life (security, home, power, food, clothing, and a name). Therefore, the promises apply to all believers, who are all included in the household of God. "One basic promise is conveyed in multiple images, since all of them illustrate the principle where I am, there will the victor be."⁵⁶²

In summary, the promises attending salvation are “not to everyone but only to him who remains faithful when everything seeks to seduce him from his loyalty.”⁵⁶³ As Beale rightly observes:

“Overcomers are those whose lives are characterized by refusal to compromise their faith despite the threat of persecution. They ironically conquer when they maintain their faith even though they may appear defeated in the world's eyes because of persecution (see on 2:26-29 for further discussion of "overcoming"). Though the process of overcoming commences before death, the focus here is on the completion of the process at the end of

⁵⁶¹ For further explanation of the list of non-overcomers, Beale writes: “But there are those who are condemned. The cowards are those who loved ease and comfort more than they loved Christ, and who in the day of trial were ashamed to show whose they were and whom they served. The Authorized Version gives a wrong impression when it translates *deilos* by fearful. It is not fear that is condemned. The highest courage is to be desperately afraid and in spite of that to do the right thing and to hold fast to loyalty. What is condemned is the cowardice which denies Christ for safety's sake. The unbelieving are those who refused to accept the Gospel or those who with their lips accepted it, but by their lives showed that they did not believe it. The polluted are those who allowed themselves to be saturated by the abominations of the world. The murderers may well be those who in persecutions slaughtered the Christians. The fornicators are those who lived lives of immorality. Ephesus was full of sorcerers; Acts 19: 19 tells how at the preaching of the name of Christ in the early days the magicians burned their books. The idolaters are those who worshipped the false gods of whom the world was full. The liars are those who were guilty of untruth and of the silence which is also a lie.” William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 206.

⁵⁶² Beale, *NIGNTC: The Book of Revelation*, 271.

⁵⁶³ Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, (Vol. 2), 205.

one's life, and especially on the full inheritance at the end of the old world. The purpose of this verse, and the whole of 21:1-22:5, is to encourage true Christians to persevere through hardship in order to inherit the fullness of God's blessings."⁵⁶⁴

Test Five: The Discipleship Test

The word disciple translates to the Greek *mathētēs*. Primarily, it could also be rendered as learner and pupil.⁵⁶⁵ Generally, “A man is called a *mathētēs* when he binds himself to someone else in order to acquire his practical and theoretical knowledge.”⁵⁶⁶ Such a person “may be an apprentice in a trade, a student of medicine, or a member of a philosophical school. One can only be a *mathētēs* in the company of a *didaskalos*, a master or teacher, to whom the *mathētēs* since the days of the Sophists generally had to pay a fee.”⁵⁶⁷

In the NT, the noun *mathētēs* occurs 264 times exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.⁵⁶⁸ In addition to the disciples of Jesus, John the Baptist,⁵⁶⁹ the Pharisees,⁵⁷⁰ Moses (John 9:28), and Paul (Acts 9:24-25), all had disciples. A study of the Gospel of John shows that not all disciples are genuine. Fortunately, the author gives the criteria for evaluating authentic discipleship. These are the (1) believing test, (2) continuing test, (3) continuing in the word test, and finally, (4) bearing fruit test. John 6, 8, and 15 will examine these four tests of discipleship.

⁵⁶⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1057.

⁵⁶⁵ D. Müller, “Disciple” in *NIDNTT*, Vol. 1. Edit. Collin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 483.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 484.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁵⁶⁹ Matt. 9:14; 11:2; 14:12; John 3:25.

⁵⁷⁰ Matt.22:15-16; Mark 2:18.

Discipleship in John 6

The Bread of Life discourse recorded in John 6 unlocks a horizon for understanding some primary characteristics of discipleship. One commentator even remarks that the “real theme of the bread of life discourse is discipleship.”⁵⁷¹ Barclay concurs and adds, “Few New Testament passages have such a complete picture of discipleship as this.”⁵⁷² The thrust of the discourse reveals that whereas there are different attitudes towards discipleship, the litmus test of discipleship is a determined continued commitment to follow the master.

Like a concentric layer, the account shows three categories of people. At the outer circle of the narratives is “a great multitude” (6:2, 5). These followed Him “because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased” (6:2). While the signs in John’s Gospel are means to lead to a belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Christ (20:31), the men who ate the bread only saw him as “Rabbi” (6:25) and “that prophet that should come into the world” (6:14), a possible reference to Deut. 18:15-18.⁵⁷³

Failing to see him as the Christ and Son of God elicits a wrong response to the miracles. Instead of believing and receiving him as the true bread from heaven, they plotted to “make him a king” (John 6:15), perhaps “a warrior king”⁵⁷⁴ who would liberate them from the political juggernaut of Rome and continue supplying literal needs a move which was resisted by Jesus (John 6:15). Undaunted, “on the following day” (6:22) they pursued Jesus to Capernaum (6:25).

⁵⁷¹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 120.

⁵⁷² Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, (Vol. II), 20.

⁵⁷³ Klink III, *John*, 306.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Jesus would challenge their motives for following him and call them to the plane of true discipleship.

Rather than being dismissive of the multitudes who sought him in Capernaum, Jesus redirects their focus. He encourages them to work for the bread that endures eternal life (John 6:27) instead of working for the bread that perishes. Since believing in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God (John 20:31) is the primer to eternal life, it stands to reason that to the inquiry from the people, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (6:28) Jesus responds, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (6:29). The tense of the verb “believe” (*pisteuēte*) is worth nothing. The present tense implies that “believing in Jesus is less an *act* of faith and more a *life* of faith.”⁵⁷⁵

The verb *ērgāzomai* occurs eight times⁵⁷⁶ while the noun *érgon* 27 times in his gospel.⁵⁷⁷ In the discourse in John 6, he uses the verb *ērgāzomai* thrice and the noun *érgon* twice. The required *érgon* was to believe in Jesus. As Hoskins comments, “How does one escape the threat of death and gain eternal life? Two main answers emerge. First, one must come to Jesus and believe in him (6:29, 40, 47). Second, one must also eat the true bread from heaven, which is the flesh of Jesus, and must drink his blood (6:32-33, 51, 53-55).”⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 328.

⁵⁷⁶ John 3:21; 5:17(2x); 6:27, 28, 30; 9:4(2x).

⁵⁷⁷ John 3:19, 20, 21; 4:34; 5:20, 36(2X); 6:28, 29; 7:3, 7, 21; 8: 39, 41; 9:3(2X); 10:25, 32(2X), 33, 37, 38; 14:10, 11, 12; 15:24; 17:4.

⁵⁷⁸ Paul M. Hoskins, “Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect Of The Fulfillment Of The Passover In The Gospel Of John,” *JETS* 52 (Jun 2009), 296.

Two Barriers to Belief

The author acknowledged two barriers to belief in this discourse. The author identifies the great multitude (6:2), the people (6:22, 2,4), and the Jews (6:41) as Jesus' interlocutors. That they were Jews becomes evident in v. 31, where they referred to their fathers who "ate the manna in the desert" (6:31).

Firstly, a knowledge of the biological descent of Jesus stands up as the first hindrance to their acceptance of Jesus' true identity. When Jesus claims to be the bread of life (v. 42), "the crowd balked at Jesus' assertion by protesting that Jesus was only from earth - born of human parents (vv. 41-43)."⁵⁷⁹ This protest is nothing new since "the rejection of Jesus based on familiarity with his family origins" also appears in Matt 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6).⁵⁸⁰ Jesus addresses their difficulty regarding the source of His parentage. Rather than regarding their objection as innocent, He characterizes it as murmuring (*gongyzō*), which reveals their unbelief.⁵⁸¹ "This Greek word describes the rebellious grumbling of the Israelites against the Lord and Moses in the wilderness (Exod. 17:3; Num 14:26-35)."⁵⁸²

The second hindrance to belief surfaces as Jesus presents Himself as the bread "one may eat of it and not die" (6:50) to the Jews familiar with the history of the physical bread Moses gave to their ancestors.⁵⁸³ What did Jesus mean by this metaphor? How did the Jews understand

⁵⁷⁹ C. Marvin Pate, *The Writings of John, A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

⁵⁸⁰ David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 155.

⁵⁸¹ Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, 697.

⁵⁸² Martin and Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 126. Further, he reiterates that "He is from God" (John 6:46), and "comes down from heaven" (John 6:50, 51).

⁵⁸³ Hoskins notes that this evokes the sacrificial system and the Passover experience. Remarks, "Giving his flesh sounds like he is talking about his death in sacrificial terms, especially in combination with the mention of

him? Just as Nicodemus understood the new birth on a literal level (Jn 3:5), the Jews, “scandalized by the idea that Jesus was inviting them to an act of cannibalism,”⁵⁸⁴ misunderstood Jesus by their literal reasoning, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” (6:52). Even though the language of John 6 has some connections with the Passover, the “connection between the blood of Jesus and the blood of the Passover lamb is more difficult. The blood of the Passover lamb was a central aspect of the celebration, but not for drinking (Exod. 12:7, Lev 17:10-14).”⁵⁸⁵ Besides, the Bible, without exception, forbids the literal consumption of blood.⁵⁸⁶

By insisting that “whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him at the last day” (John 6:54), Jesus makes “believing” equivalent to “eating his flesh and drinking his blood.” In this context, Weinrich says that “to ‘eat’ the ‘bread’ that Jesus as the incarnated logos [‘Word,’ Jn 1:14] himself is means therefore, to unite oneself to him utterly, to believe on him who is one with the Father and to love him.”⁵⁸⁷ Michaels explains further:

The text should be read if possible from within the horizons of the dramatic confrontation being described at Capernaum, so as to speak both to “the Jews” on the scene (even if it gives offense) and to Christian readers after the fact. The theme of the discourse so far has been Jesus' claim to give “life”, “eternal life” (see vv. 27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 51), and that to receive that life a person must “come to him” (vv. 35, 37, 44, 45) and “believe” (vv. 29, 30, 35, 36, 40, 47). Now the shocking truth emerges that the “life” he promises comes through death, and only through death. To “believe” means to accept fully the reality of death, a violent death at that, as the only way to “eternal life.” In short, the “Amen, amen” saying in verse 53, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves,” defines the “Amen, amen saying in verse 47, “whoever believes has eternal life.”⁵⁸⁸

blood in 6:53. Flesh/meat and blood are the two main components of a sacrifice, including the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:7-8).” Hoskins, “Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb,” *JETS*, 297.

⁵⁸⁴ Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, 730-731.

⁵⁸⁵ Hoskins, “Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb,” *JETS*, 297.

⁵⁸⁶ Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26; 17:10; 19:26; Deut. 12:23; Acts 15:20.

⁵⁸⁷ Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, 731.

⁵⁸⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 396. Hoskins further unravels the meaning of “eating his flesh and drinking his blood” as follows: The solution to the dilemma is hinted at in John 6:63, which says that the Spirit, not

At the end of the discourse, many of his disciples shrank from His invitation to identify with Him and "walked with Him no more" (6:66). According to Klink, "to walk no longer with one's teacher was to resign formally from his instruction and disassociate from his message."⁵⁸⁹ In addition, since "To walk with someone reflects Semitic idioms for fellowship (walking with God in Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9; Mal 2:6 . . . The expression indicates that the apostate disciples no longer regarded Jesus as their Teacher. They had ceased to be his disciples."⁵⁹⁰ Thus, Schnackenburg is correct in his assessment that "The withdrawal and abandonment of fellowship in traveling with Jesus is an outward expression of inward apostasy, a falling back into the darkness far from Jesus (cf. 8: 12; 12:35)."⁵⁹¹

As for the reason given for the retreat from discipleship, they reasoned that the words of Jesus are hard sayings. The saying (ho logos) in this context includes "everything from Jesus' heavenly origins to his being food and drink to those who believe in him."⁵⁹² Barclay explains that the Greek word *sklēros* "means not *hard to understand* but *hard to accept*."⁵⁹³ He continues, "The disciples knew quite well that Jesus had been claiming to be the very life of God come

the flesh, gives life. One aspect of the significance of this verse is that it helps to clarify that Jesus is talking in symbolic language rather than actually advocating that one eat human flesh and drink human blood. Eating his physical flesh would not give life, just as eating the manna did not give life. Without going into details here, Jesus appears to be saying that one needs to appropriate ("eat" and "drink") the benefits of his sacrificial death ("flesh" and "blood") in order to have eternal life. John 6:63 provides further help in that it points to the way in which the believer will eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus. If it is the Spirit that gives life, then it is likely to be the Spirit that feeds the believer with the life-giving benefits of the sacrificial death of Jesus. The Spirit is elsewhere referred to in terms of living water that the believer will receive after Jesus is glorified (7:37–39). One can already begin to experience the Spirit's life-giving power by receiving the words of Jesus (6:63)." Hoskins, "Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb," *JETS*, 297.

⁵⁸⁹ Klink III, *John*, 344.

⁵⁹⁰ Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, 761.

⁵⁹¹ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, (Vol. 2), 75.

⁵⁹² Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 76.

⁵⁹³ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, (Vol. 1), 226.

down from heaven and that no one could live this life or face eternity without submitting to him. Here we come upon a truth that re-emerges in every age. Time and again, it is not the intellectual difficulty which keeps men from becoming Christians; it is the height of Christ's moral demand."⁵⁹⁴

At the end of the discourse, the distinction between nominal and true disciples emerges. Although all the people designated as disciples heard Jesus, they responded differently. Jesus later categorized the disciples who turned back as unbelievers (6:64).⁵⁹⁵ Borchert notes that although “the text indicates that even though they “heard” (*akouein*) Jesus they failed to “accept” (*akouein*) the word (logos) of Jesus. The wordplay here is important because it reminds the reader that the mere hearing of words is not enough it is “obedience” the implied meaning of *akouein* that is important.”⁵⁹⁶ Borchert concludes, “Thus it should be evident that discipleship in John is far more than a matter of saying the right words or belonging to a group. It is a matter of obediently following Jesus (6:60; cf. 12:42-43).”⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Borchert, *John 1-11*, 274. “This interchange with Jesus in John 6 shows that the term disciple in its broadest sense can even refer to unbelievers. They merit the term because outwardly they are followers or learners of Christ, though they may only have the barest personal commitment to Him. In fact, their motivation seems little more than political (v 15), or to obtain free food (vv 26, 34), or simply to satisfy their curiosity.” Charles C. Bing, “Coming To Terms With Discipleship,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 05 (Spring 1992), 41-42.

⁵⁹⁶ Borchert, *John 1-11*, 274.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. Barclay also adds. “The real difficulty of Christianity is two-fold. It demands an act of surrender to Christ and acceptance of him as the final authority; and it demands A moral standard of the highest level. The disciples were well aware that Jesus had claimed to be the very life and mind of God come down to earth; their difficulty was to accept that as true with all its implications. To this day many a man refuses Christ not because he puzzles intellect, but because he challenges his life.”⁵⁹⁷ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, (Vol. 1), 227.

Summary of John 6

In summary, a true disciple (1) believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (2), and participates in Jesus through accepting and obeying His words. In contrast, whereas superficial, non-committed, spurious, or temporal disciples exhibit unbelief (6:64) and abandon Jesus along the way (6:66), true disciples are characterized by (1) a belief in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God (6:70), (2) clinging to him as the one who has the words of life (6:68). “As a result of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus, people remain in Jesus and he remains in them, which means they are true children of God and are free from the threat of death (6:53-56).”⁵⁹⁸

A disciple “is a committed, continuing follower of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹⁹ Lescelius is right when he asserts, “We maintain that being a believer and a disciple are the same. A believer/disciple has salvation. One who has salvation is a disciple.”⁶⁰⁰ In other words, “The call to faith and discipleship are the same and cannot be separated.”⁶⁰¹

Discipleship in John 8

John 8 demonstrates and speaks eloquently that true disciples continue in the word. The chapter begins with Jesus teaching at the temple when suddenly he is interrupted by the scribes and Pharisees to pass judgment on a woman caught in adultery (8:1-2). After this episode (8:1-11), he resumes his teaching with a declaration of one of the “I Am” statements, “I am the light

⁵⁹⁸ Hoskins, “Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb,” *JETS*, 298.

⁵⁹⁹ David E. Lanier, “The Multiplication of Disciples,” *Faith and Mission*, 16 (Spring 1999), 8 .

⁶⁰⁰ Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 65.

⁶⁰¹ J. Wallis, “Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience,” *Sojourners* (March 1976): 21.

of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (8:12). The Greek verb *akolouthēo* usually translated as “follow” v. 12 is another word that links this passage to the concept of discipleship in John’s Gospel.⁶⁰² “It is used over sixty times in the Gospels in reference to following Christ.”⁶⁰³

Before John 8, the verb occurs in chapters one and six. He uses the word to describe the actions of the disciples of John who “followed Jesus.”⁶⁰⁴ Later on, in the same chapter, Jesus invited Philip to “follow him” (1:43). The word also describes the actions of the crowds who followed Jesus in 6:2. Beyond John 8, the true sheep follow Jesus (10:4, 27), not strangers (10:5) and those who serve Him follow him (12:26).

The word *akolouthēo* does not describe the follower’s genuineness or quality. Context decides. For example, while the earlier disciples who followed Jesus endured to the end (1:37-40), some of the followers of Jesus later on abandoned him (6:2, 60-66). Thus, the context determines the temporal or enduring nature of discipleship.

In teaching, Jesus is interrupted by the Scribes and Pharisees, who present and accuse a woman purportedly caught in adultery. After several exchanges, the accusers leave the scene, leaving Jesus and the woman alone. Eventually, Jesus rescues the woman and instructs her to go and sin no more (8:1-11). Following this incident, Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (8:12). The verb “follows”

⁶⁰² On the link between “following” and “discipleship,” Marianne writes, “While “following” (*akolouthein*) Jesus often entails his physical presence (21 :20), following can refer more generally to discipleship (1 :43); hence it does not require Jesus’ physical presence but also describes discipleship in the post-resurrection period (2 I:22).” Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 183.

⁶⁰³ Bing, “Coming to Terms with Discipleship,” *JOTGES*, 39.

⁶⁰⁴ John 1:37-38, 40).

translates the Greek *akolouthēo*. This is another synonym for discipleship.⁶⁰⁵ The Pharisees challenged Jesus' self-description as the light of the world, to which Jesus appealed to the Father as a co-witness.⁶⁰⁶ As the sermon unfolds, John writes that "many believed in Him" (8:30).

The verb *ēpisteusan*, an aorist active indicative together with *eis*, that is, *ēpisteusan + eis*, appears a couple of times in John. This prepositional phrase describes believing in Jesus as a result of miraculous signs. Such use occurs in Cana (2:11), Jerusalem at the Passover (2:23)⁶⁰⁷, and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:45). Secondly, it describes believing as a result of witnessing or a discourse. For example, believing in Jesus occurred in Samaritan as a result of the Samaritan woman's witness (4:39) and John's witness about Jesus (10:42). In the case of John 8, "many believed in him" (8:30) as a result of Jesus' light of the world sermon.

In John's Gospel, the use of *ēpisteusan + eis* does not indicate the authenticity or quality of the "believing." Therefore, the nature of "believing" must be inferred from the context since the prepositional phrase *ēpisteusan + eis* describes both genuine and superficial exercises of trust in Jesus. In John 2:23, although the people believed in Jesus, he did not trust their belief (2:24). Thus, from John 8:30 alone, it is hard to determine whether the faith exercised in Jesus was genuine or fake. Comparing John 2:23-25 and John 8:30, Borchert asserts,

As Jesus was not convinced by the believing of the Jews in 2:23-25, he was not misled by the believing noted in 8:30. Instead he called forth from those who believed the quality of consistency epitomized in the Johannine term "abide," "continue," or "remain" (*menein*,

⁶⁰⁵ John uses the word to describe genuine disciples who followed Jesus (1:37-38, 40, 43), the crowds (6:2), and the sheep who followed Jesus (10:4, 5, 27). Jesus also bids would-be disciples to follow him (12:36).

⁶⁰⁶ "The Pharisees challenge Jesus that his testimony cannot be true (*alethes*) on the grounds that the law requires the evidence of two (or even three) witnesses (v. 17). Jesus offers two responses. First, his testimony is true because "I know where I come from and where I am going" (v. 14); second, he does have a second witness, "the Father who sent me" (v. 16)." Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 184.

⁶⁰⁷ John 7:31 records believing in Jesus as a result of signs.

hold to) The believer who is committed to abide in Jesus and his word is in this gospel to be designated as an authentic (*alēthēs*) disciple (cf. 6:64-66; contrast 5:38).⁶⁰⁸

Although John stated in the prologue that “His own did not receive Him” (1:11), “Jesus’ address to “the Jews who had believed in him” (cf. 7:31) demonstrates that “the Jews” are not portrayed monolithically in the Gospel as “unbelievers.”⁶⁰⁹ Thus to these Jewish believers, Jesus will once set forth the conditions of genuine discipleship, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (Jn 8:31).

If (*ἐὰν*) “introduces the protasis of a third-class condition.”⁶¹⁰ Jesus presents abiding in him as the test of steadfast commitment to him. Anyone who truly believes will continue in his word. While Beasley-Murray characterizes remaining in the word as “the primary duty of a believer” and “the mark of a real disciple,”⁶¹¹ Klink calls it “the mood of existence for the Christian.”⁶¹² As for the meaning of “continuing,” Hughes writes as follows:

Abiding in the word involves two things – studying the word and obeying it. The result is freedom. Christ showed us the process in the verse we just cited. Christ says first, in verse 31, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.” When one abides in the Word, he becomes a disciple, or literally a learner. “If you abide in my word, you are truly my *learners*. That is, you put yourself in a progressively liberating status if you abide in the Word. If you become a learner of truth, further possibilities of truth open to you that you could never have known before.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁸ Borchert, *John 1-11*, 302-303.

⁶⁰⁹ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 189.

⁶¹⁰ Novakovic, *John 1-10*, 282.

⁶¹¹ Beasley-Murray, *WBC: John*, 133.

⁶¹² Klink III, *John*, 414.

⁶¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *John, That You May Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 251.

The concept of an initial response to Jesus and the necessity of continuing in "believing" or "following" as a test of authenticity comes to the fore in this passage. Thompson is, therefore, correct that "In the present passage, there is an implied contrast between initial belief and the perseverance that is characterized as "continuing" or "abiding." Those who continue or endure in their faith, who do not abandon Jesus, are genuinely (*alethos*) his disciples."⁶¹⁴ In the same vein, Klink writes, "The true disciple is the one who remains in the word of Jesus."⁶¹⁵

The narrative in John 8 parallels John 6 in some respects. Both reports have a Jewish audience (6:52 and 8:31). Secondly, Jesus challenges the audience in both narratives. Whereas in John 6 he challenges the audience to "believe," he calls them to "continue" in his word in John 8 (v. 31). Thirdly, there is a similar response to Jesus' challenge. In John 6, many of the Jewish disciples murmured at the terms of discipleship (6:41) and questioned his invitation to eat his flesh (6:52). Eventually, they rejected his words "and went back to walk with him no more" (6:66). The response of the audience in the case of John 8 will be examined shortly. However, it is a similar response. Fourthly, the consequences of the responses in both scenarios border on keeping or letting go of eternal life. Whereas those who left in John 6 are categorized as unbelievers (6:64), Jesus presents those who continue in his word as true disciples in John 8 (3:31).

Fifthly, both accounts indicate that a person's initial response to Jesus is insufficient for eternal life. Continuing in Jesus is necessary for eternal life. In the case of John 8, beyond the

⁶¹⁴ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 184.

⁶¹⁵ Klink III, *John*, 414.

initial reaction to Jesus, a person must accept and “abide in His Word.” In this case, as the dialogue between Jesus and the Jews progresses, it becomes conspicuous that what he is setting forth is an epistemic validation of true discipleship.

Now back to the similarity between the response to Jesus’ challenge in John 8 and the adverse reaction in John 6. Although John categorized the Jews as believers, they questioned him in disbelief. To Jesus’ words, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), they responded, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” (8:33).

Jesus challenges them by exposing their true nature. To their claim that they are “Abraham’s descendants” (8:37), Jesus retorts that their murderous intentions (8:37) and inability to listen to his word (8:43, 47) illustrate their paternal affinity to the devil (8:44). Just as true believers are born of God (John 1:13), Jesus exposed their true paternal ancestry, “You are of your father the devil” (8:44). Eventually, these believers demonstrate their true colors with despicable insults. They call Jesus a “Samaritan” (8:48) and twice as having a “demon” (8:48, 52). To this insult, Jesus still focuses on their initial invitation to continue in His Word. The fury of the Jews reaches a climax when Jesus declares, “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (8:51). Notice the consistency with which he insists on continuing in his word. In this instance, “Abide in my word” is rendered as “keep my words.”⁶¹⁶

They vehemently protest that the death of Abraham and the prophets indicate that Jesus’ statement is untrue. Jesus’ additional declaration that before Abraham, “I am” (8:58) drives the Jews to frenzy. The Jews who “believed” (8:30) and were instructed to abide in Jesus’ word (8:31) “took up stones to throw at Him.” (John 8:59). Burges observes:

⁶¹⁶ As a pattern for believers, Jesus keeps the word of the Father (5:55).

“The discussion now moves on address those “who had believed” (8:31). Yet as the story unfolds, it is evident that despite their interest in Jesus, they are unwilling to accept the deeper truths about him. In fact, this audience becomes the very audience that launches the most severe criticisms of Jesus in the entire gospel. In the end they argue that Jesus is demon-possessed. And Jesus even says that rather than acting like children of Abraham they are behaving like children of the devil.⁶¹⁷

In the end, the section that opens with a surprising declaration of belief ends with an attempt on Jesus’s life, leading to the apparent conclusion that true discipleship is tested with “if you hold to my teaching” (8:31b).⁶¹⁸ Assessing the discourse, Leon Morris writes that this section “is addressed to those who believe, and yet do not believe.”⁶¹⁹ He continues, “Clearly, they were inclined to think that what Jesus said was true. But they were not prepared to yield him the far-reaching allegiance that real trust in him implies.”⁶²⁰

Continuity As a Matter of Life and Death

John 8:31 places the imperative of discipleship on a somber note. "The reference here to being disciples "truly" (8:31; cf. 1:47; 1 John 2:5) suggests a way to confirm one's discipleship in contrast to false disciples who would eventually fail. Early Christianity continued to distinguish between true and false believers."⁶²¹ It underlines the indispensability of genuine discipleship where only "... those who continue in it will have eternal life (8:51; cf. 5:24), but those in whom

⁶¹⁷ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary, Gen. Ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 259.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Leon Morris, *NICNT: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 454.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. Morris goes on to sound a note of caution, “This is a most dangerous spiritual state. To recognize that truth is in Jesus and to do nothing about it means that in effect one ranges oneself with the enemies of the Lord.” Ibid., 454.

⁶²¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel According to John: A Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 747.

it has no place (8:43; cf. 5:38) seek even his death (8:37)"⁶²² Rainbow aptly summarizes the discourse on discipleship in John 8 as follows:

Several epigrammatic statements lay out the twofold structure of John's scheme of soteriology. Faith lays hold of salvation; continuation in Jesus' word completes it. "If you continue [μένειν] in my word," said Jesus to a group of people who had "believed" (ἐπίστευσαν, aorist) in him (In 8:30), "you are truly [ἀληθῶς] my disciples" (In 8:31-32). Jesus distinguishes between entry into faith and genuine discipleship. Not ephemeral profession, but rather steadfast abiding in his word, is the condition ("If .. ") for authenticity. Jesus' word includes not only his claims about his unique relation to the Father (cf. Jn 7:28-30; 8:23-24) but also his commandments; so perseverance involves both profession and conduct. A disciple acknowledges the truth about Jesus, a true disciple does what he says. Lacking these things, people show themselves to be children of the devil (In 8:44) and "not of God" (In 8:47).⁶²³

Test Six: Abiding Test

The Greek word *mēno* has a semantic range that includes but is not limited to "abiding," "remaining," "staying," "persevering," "enduring," "continuing," and "tarrying."⁶²⁴ John uses the word to describe staying physically in a specific geographical location, as in the instances below. The disciples asked where Jesus lived and dwelt with him that day (John 1:38-39); Jesus with his family and disciples stayed in Capernaum (John 2:12), in Samaria (John 4:40)⁶²⁵, Galilee (John 7:9), beyond the Jordan where John baptized (John 10:40; 11:6), and later in his ministry in a city called Ephraim (John 11:54). The word further describes the descent of the

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 314.

⁶²⁴ Christopher David Bass, "A Johannine Perspective Of The Human Responsibility To Persevere In The Faith Through The Use Of μένω And Other Related Motifs," *WTJ*, 69 (Fall 2007), 306.

⁶²⁵ Bass provides further elaboration on physical sense of abiding below. "In John 4:40, Jesus has just completed a discussion with the Samaritan woman, which is followed by a conversation with numerous town members, whereby they came to believe in him (4:39). Now convinced that they were in the presence of the "Savior of the world" (4:42), they requested that Jesus might "abide" with them. John tells us that Jesus does in fact honor their request and "abides" with them for two days. Here it is evident that in those two days, Jesus physically dwelled (abided) with the Samaritan people." Ibid., 307.

Holy Spirit who remained upon him (John 1:32-33) as well as the body of Jesus on the cross (John 19:31).

Apart from John's use of *mēno* to describe physical realities, he also used the word to describe the metaphorical mutual abiding relationship between the Father and the Son. When Philip requested, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us" (John 14:8), Jesus pointed to the mutual abiding between him and his Father (John 14:10) as evidence of their oneness. Thus, he concluded, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Thompson explains,

Jesus' statement "The one who has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 9) does not simply conflate the identities of the Father and the Son. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has identified himself as the Son, the representative of God who speaks the words and does the life-giving works of the Father. To see the works of Jesus is to see the works of God because "the one who is sent is like the one who sent him" (*m. Ber.* 5.5; see comments on 5:28-29; 13: 16-20). But that is not all. Because the Father dwells in him, Jesus is also the representation of the Father. Thus, to see him is to see the Father. Indeed, no one sees God directly—that is, no one but the Son (1: 18; 5:37; 6:46). Yet there remains a true, if mediated, vision of the Father through the Son, because the Son does the Father's work, and because Father and Son mutually dwell in one another (14:11). To see the works of Jesus is to see the work of God; to see the Son is to see the one in whom the Father dwells and who dwells in the Father. Because of their unity in work and their mutual indwelling, because they are one (10:30), to see the Son is to see the Father.⁶²⁶

Regarding the ontological nature of the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son and what it means for believers, Bass rightly observes "that there is a metaphysical union between the Father and the Son." However, this union "is categorically different from the union that any human might have with God since the Father and the Son have eternally coexisted in the Godhead (1:1–2)."⁶²⁷ As Jesus patterns the mutual relationship between Himself and believers

⁶²⁶ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 309-310.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

on the Father-Son relationship, “this union should also be seen as the supreme example of the relationship that believers can have with God.”⁶²⁸

Apart from the ontological dimension, the nature of the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son also explains the source or origin of the words and acts of the Son. It demonstrates a unity of purpose and acts. Jesus declares that “the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). Further, John writes, “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. 21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so, the Son gives life to whom He will” (John 5:20-21). Aside from investing the Son with authority to raise the dead, “the Father judges no one but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him (John 5:19-23). As the Son speaks and acts in obedience to the Father, the Father actively works in and through him. “Hence, there is an ongoing abiding relationship between them.”⁶²⁹

The concept of mutual abiding between Jesus and believers is interwoven with other Johannine motifs to emphasize the idea of continuity. True love for Christ continues and endures; genuine disciples continue with their master; the only belief that matters is a continuous daily exercise of faith in Christ. Thus, from the perspective of Johannine literature, continuity connects believing, loving, following (discipleship), and abiding.

The importance of abiding is related to the central purpose of John’s Gospel. Jesus came to give life (John 20:30) to those who believe in him as the one in whom life dwells (John 1:4).

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

Hence, for spiritual life to exist in a person, there must be a continuous, uninterrupted flow of energy between Christ and the person. To disconnect from Christ is to disconnect from life. The extended metaphor of the vine and the branches in John 15 explains the nature and purpose of the mutual indwelling between Christ and his disciples.

Abiding and Fruit-Bearing

Before exploring the nature of “abiding,” it may be helpful to state the purpose of the extended metaphor of the vine and its branches in John 15. According to Marsh, “John 15:1–5 highlights Jesus’ final “I Am” statement demonstrating that he alone is the true vine, his Father is the sovereign cultivator, and true disciples are those who (abide) or utterly depend on him for life.”⁶³⁰ Although Marsh correctly observes that true disciples remain in the vine, fruitfulness is the ultimate purpose of abiding. John 15:1-17 emphasizes the necessity of fruit-bearing in the life of a disciple.

A survey of the Greek word *karpòs* translated as “fruit,” occurs ten times in John’s Gospel. Besides 4:36 and 12:24, all the other occurrences of the word, which accounts for 80%, appear in John 15.⁶³¹ On the other hand, while John uses *mèno* in all the chapters [except 13, 16, 17, 18, 20], out of the overall 40 occurrences,⁶³² it appears 11 times in 15:4-16 alone. This preponderance of “fruit” and “abide” confirms the ultimate goal of fruitfulness in the life of a disciple in John 15.

⁶³⁰ Cory M. Marsh, “Jesus As The True Vine: A Transition Of Economies Announced At John 15,” *JMT*, 23(Spring 2019), 110.

⁶³¹ John 15:2(3x), 4, 5, 8, 16 (2x).

⁶³² John 1:32, 33, 38, 39 (2x); 2:12; 3:36; 4:40 (2x); 5:38; 6:27, 56; 7:9; 8:31, 35 (2x); 9:41; 10:40; 11:6, 54; 12:24, 34, 46; 14:10, 17, 25; 15:4(3x), 5, 6, 7 (2x), 9, 10 (2x), 16; 19:31; 21:22, 23.

According to Robert L. Dean, Jr, “the majority of Reformed commentators have adopted the view that this passage addresses the inevitability of fruit-bearing in the genuinely saved believer, thus making ‘abiding’ a semantic equivalent of ‘believe’ and fruit production a necessary evidence of genuine saving faith.”⁶³³ Besides Reformed commentators, “this is also the position of Lordship salvation advocates who follow the Reformed position.”⁶³⁴ In summary, abiding in the vine is essential in so far as attaining the desired goal of fruitfulness is concerned.

John 15 is part of an extended passage from chapters 13-17. The washing of the feet of the disciples (13:5) demonstrates that the immediate audience of the discourse was the eleven disciples after Judas had left (13:30). In John 14:31, Jesus gives the command, “Arise, let us go from here.” Possibly, Jesus left the Upper Room with His disciples on His way to Gethsemane. However, it is also possible that Jesus delayed his departure since 18:1 tells us, “When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.”⁶³⁵

The Old Testament provides a rich background for John’s description of the extended metaphor in John 15.⁶³⁶ By designating himself as the “true vine” (15:1), Jesus was setting a

⁶³³ Robert L. Dean, Jr., “Abiding In Christ: A Dispensational Theology Of The Spiritual Life (Part 1 Of 3),” *CTSJ* 7 (Jan 2001), 25.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁵ Thompson makes a similar observation “The previous portion of Jesus' last words to his disciples ends with an invitation, “Rise; let us go from here” (14:31). Jesus anticipates his departure from the supper with his disciples to face his arrest, trial, and death, yet his departure is delayed: no one leaves as Jesus keeps talking at some length.” Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 322.

⁶³⁶ “Those biblical descriptions often recount God's care for the vine in the past while lamenting its desolation in the present. God “brought a vine out of Egypt,” cleared the soil, and then planted and cared for the vine, but now it has been cut down and burned with fire (Ps 80:8-16).¹¹³ Isaiah laments that while God cared for his vineyard, it failed to produce appropriate fruit, leading to its apparent abandonment by God (Isa 5:1-10). Yet Isaiah foresees a day when the vine is once again cared for and protected by God, and so becomes abundantly fruitful (27:2-6; 60:21).” *Ibid.*, 323.

contrast between Israel as the vine (Ps. 80:8-16), although unfruitful (Isa. 5:1-7), and He as the fruitful vine. Jesus places fruitfulness at the center of the discourse on “abiding” by his declaration that “every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit (John 15:2). Here, the survival or destruction of a branch depends on either fruitfulness or fruitlessness. Defining the sole objective of the vine as fruit-bearing echoes a common theme in the OT.

In the OT, the fruit of the vine was food for the poor, beasts of the field, the stranger, the hungry, the widow, and the fatherless (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 20:6; 23:24; 24:21). A vine or vineyard without fruits awaits destruction according to the OT. For instance, Deuteronomy categorizes not enjoying the fruits of one’s vineyard as part of the curses of the covenant (Deut. 28:30). Further, in Ezekiel 15, a fruitless vine is useless for anything apart from fire for fuel. The prophet laments:

“Son of man, how is the wood of the vine *better* than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³ Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can *men* make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? ⁴ Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for *any* work? ⁵ Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for *any* work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned? ⁶ “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷ and I will set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. ⁸ Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,’ says the Lord God.” (Ezek. 15:2-8)

Isaiah 5 states the fate of the fruitless vine in the Well-Beloved Vineyard. After planting His vineyard on a fruitful hill, He dug it up, cleared its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst And made a winepress in it” (Isa. 5:1-2). However, when “He expected it to bring forth good grapes,” to his surprise, “it brought forth wild grapes” (Isa. 5:2).

The inevitable judgment on the vineyard follows. “And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned, And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down” (Isa. 5:5).

Thompson writes that “these various depictions of Israel as a vine highlight both the tenderness of God’s care for the vine and the dire consequences that result if God ceases to care for and protect it. Most typically, God allows the vine to be destroyed because it has not produced fruit.”⁶³⁷ Similarly, J. Lyle Story adds, “The judicial statement about taking away ... (15.2a) is placed before the positive (v. 2b) and the imperative, ‘abide’ (μείνατε – v. 4) so as to emphasize the importance of abiding. Failure to abide and subsequent failure to produce fruit holds dire consequences. The new relationship’ demands movement, growth; its law is καρπὸν φέρειν’.”⁶³⁸

Fruitless Branch: Tended or Destroyed?

The vinedresser *airō* every branch in the vine that does not bear fruit (15:2). Depending on the context, *airō* could be “lift” or “take way.” Derickson lays out the three popular interpretive options. (1) the unfruitful branches of verse 2 and burned branches of verse 6 represent Christians who lose their salvation, (2) they represent professing “Christians” who never had salvation, or (3) they represent unfruitful Christians who are cared for by God and then eventually are disciplined through death.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 323-324.

⁶³⁸ J. Lyle Story, “The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17),” *JPT*, 26 (2017), 167-168.

⁶³⁹ Gary W. Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1-6,” *BSAC*, 153 (Jan 1996), 35.

Standing on the turf with those who hold the third position, Tucker writes that fruitless branches in 15:2a are Christians the Father gives further care.⁶⁴⁰ By translating ἀίρει as “lift,” he argues that the verse “describes some who are in Him, yet are not yet able to bear fruit until they further mature by maintaining a close communion by abiding in Him.”⁶⁴¹ Tucker distinguishes between “in me” and “abide in me.” Moreover, he equates “in me” with salvation and “abide in me” with the relationship that continues as the aftermath of salvation. “To be “in Him,” he writes, “begins with the organic union of salvation, and it, of necessity, extends into ongoing, intimate fellowship, and abiding communion.

Whereas to be “in Him” necessitates salvation, Tucker asserts that the addition of the word “abide” before the prepositional phrase, “in Him,” qualifies how deep such a relationship will progress.”⁶⁴² “Consequently,” he continues, “it would be reasonable to maintain that to abide “in Me” means to remain in a state of close, personal association.” This “abiding involves and describes a relationship that—to borrow an appropriate horticultural term—has been carefully cultivated to be all-the-more productive after the initial organic union of justification is in place.”⁶⁴³ In summary, whereas “in me” refers to salvation, abide “in me” refers to the aftermath of salvation.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁰ John A. Tucker, “The Inevitability Of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis Of John 15:6 – Part II,” *JODT* 15 (Aug 2011): 49-68.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁴⁴ Sharing a similar view, Joseph C. Dillow writes, “As elsewhere in John’s writings, “remain” never signifies the initial event of saving faith in Christ but the enduring relationship of walking in fellowship with Him. The word “remain” implies staying in a position already obtained, not entering for the first time. If a nonbeliever should ask, “What must I do to be saved,” it would be wrong to answer, “Remain in Christ.” The believer remains in Christ (i.e., remains in fellowship with Him) by keeping His commandments.” Joseph C. Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” *BSAC* 147 (January 1990): 49-51.

Building upon the reasoning above, Tucker argues that the call to abide is a call to initiate remaining in him for those who were already believers and saved. He writes, “The Lord commanded His disciples with an aorist active imperative (μείνατε), which indicated that they were not at that time yet abiding in Him.”⁶⁴⁵ Tucker provides further elucidation:

They were at this decisive point in their walk with Him where they were ready to demonstrate their fruitbearing. They had grown and matured and were now ready to bear fruit, with the potential for more fruit and even much fruit. To appreciate the full tone of His command it could be translated, “You all *start* or *begin* abiding in Me,” which indicated they had not yet begun to fulfill this essential task in fruitbearing. If the Lord had wanted to command them to continue abiding, He would have employed the present active imperative, which could have been translated, “You all *continue* abiding in Me.” However, the Lord used the aorist active imperative form to emphasize the *initiation* of their abiding and enduring with Him, or to employ a colloquial expression, their “hanging in there” with Him.⁶⁴⁶

In response to Tucker, even if 15:3 describes the justified status of the disciples, continuing in Christ cannot be easily discounted in the saving process. In John 15:6, the fate of those who fail to abide in him points to a palpable eschatological language of destruction.⁶⁴⁷ Six things happen to those branches that do not bear fruit. They are taken away (αἶρω), and cast out (βάλλω ἔξω), wither (ξηραίνω), are gathered (συνάγω), are cast into the fire (εἰς τὸ πῦρ

⁶⁴⁵ Tucker, “The Inevitability of Fruitbearing,” *JODT*, 5.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁷ Joseph C. Dillow argues unconvincingly that this foreshadows loss of reward. “According to John 15, when a believer is not bearing fruit because of sin or spiritual immaturity, the Lord lovingly lifts him up so he can bear fruit. The believer who is in fellowship with Christ and who is bearing fruit is pruned so he can bear more fruit. The analogy of the vine and the branches signifies not organic connection with Christ but fellowship with Him. The believer who does not remain in fellowship because of disobedience is cast out in judgment and withers spiritually, and faces severe divine discipline in time and loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ.” Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1–6,” *BSAC*, 53. Similarly, Robert Dean, Jr writes, “The non-abiding branches, which are removed, could refer to the burning with fire at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15). However, not every mention of burning refers to the Lake of Fire or the Judgment Seat of Christ. The burning of the useless vine branches probably illustrates divine discipline for believers who fail to advance and sustain fellowship in Christ. Dean, Jr., “Abiding in Christ,” *CTSJ*, 48-49.

βάλλουσιν), and are burned (καίεται). Such a destiny awaits only unbelievers (Matt 3:12; 5:22; 18:8–9; 25:41; 2 Thess 1:7–8; Rev 20:15).⁶⁴⁸

Laney further shows that there is no real distinction between the people in v. 2 and v. 6. “Verse 6 is simply an expansion of the truth presented in verse 2. There is a natural flow in the context that indicates beyond reasonable doubt that those being referred to in verses 2 and 6 are the same group of people.”⁶⁴⁹ This implies that failure to abide in the vine has catastrophic eschatological consequences. Moreover, initial abiding in the vine without continuing in it cannot forestall the eschatological penalties.

Contrary to the view above, which associates the unfruitful branches with true Christians and interprets *airō* as “to lift,” “due to the context of this passage, the vast majority of NT scholarship has rightly rejected this view.”⁶⁵⁰ According to Bass, “Most argue that “to lift” does not fit the context of the passage in that it contradicts 15:6 and is best translated as “to remove.”⁶⁵¹ Köstenberger even contends that although “the term underlying “cut” (αἶρω, *airō*)

⁶⁴⁸ J. Carl Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 146 (Jan 1989), 65. Further, Laney continues: “John 15:1–6 reveals that there is no dichotomy between faith and fruit in the life of a true believer. Genuine belief is not something that “happens” and is quickly forgotten. Genuine faith means that the one who has truly trusted in the Person and work of Christ for salvation will continue to do so. The one who has been justified has also been regenerated and will, by New Covenant resources, produce fruit. This conclusion should not be surprising or regarded as unusual. The concept that genuine faith evidences itself by the production of fruit is confirmed throughout the New Testament (Matt 3:8; 7:20; Titus 1:16; James 2:17; 1 John 4:20; 5:18). Evangelical believers must not separate faith from works any more than they should separate justification from regeneration. Having affirmed salvation by grace and through faith, Paul added that salvation is “unto good works” (Eph 2:10). While Reformation theology affirms that faith alone saves, it affirms with equal conviction that the faith that saves is not *alone*. Ibid., 65-66.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁵⁰ Bass, “A Johannine Perspective Of The Human Responsibility To Persevere” *WTJ*, footnote 22.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid. Bultmann also likewise agrees. Bultmann also observes that “the first sentence says: the shoot that bears no fruit is cut off: its connexion with the Revealer is done away with, i.e. it is cut off from life and abandoned to death (v. 6).” Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 533.

can mean either “cut off” (negative purpose) or “prop up” (restorative),”⁶⁵² to understand this present reference in the sense of the latter “is almost certainly erroneous.”⁶⁵³ He reasons as follows:

More likely, the p 452 antithetical parallelism of the first part of each statement (“every branch in me that bears no fruit”/“every branch in me that does bear fruit”) is matched by corresponding divine action, be it judgment (negative [see 15:6]) or discipline (positive [Laney 1989: esp. 58–60]). In the case of Jesus’ followers, Judas was an example of the former, Peter of the latter.⁶⁵⁴

One cannot miss the import of the language of judgment and destruction associated with 15:2a and 15:6, as already noticed above. Story notes, “The primary thrust is that of exclusion from Jesus, yet eschatological judgment is present; the consequence of not abiding is disastrous. The judgmental language underscores the seriousness of the new relationship, in the imperative, ‘abide in me.’”⁶⁵⁵ For Story, “the phrase, ‘every branch in me not bearing fruit’, (πᾶν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν – v. 2a), would refer to apostates who no longer live in relationship with Jesus.”⁶⁵⁶ Grammatically, he supports this assertion by noting that “the preposition ‘in’ (ἐν) is the ‘distinctive of religious fellowship’ (‘in me’ ἐν ἐμοί in vv. 5, 6, 7), which complements the important verb, ‘I abide’ (μένω).”⁶⁵⁷ He concludes:

Since abiding is the *sine qua non* for fruit-bearing, the unproductive branch in v. 2a has the semblance of being a connected branch, but is not living in vital union with the vine. The fate described by the simple expression, ‘he takes it away’ (αἶρει αὐτὸν v. 2), leads to five progressive pictures in v. 6.51 ‘Removing the branch finalizes the separation that has

⁶⁵² Köstenberger *BECNT: John*, 417.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Story, “The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17),” *JPT*, 168.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

already occurred.’ The devastation of the vineyard and useless vines echoes judgmental language from the Old Testament.⁶⁵⁸

The Meaning of Fruit in the Johannine Literature

Fruit is a common metaphor in both the OT and NT.⁶⁵⁹ The Greek καρπός, translated as “fruit,” occurs only 11 times in the Johannine literature. John uses the word once in Revelation and ten times in the Gospel. The word never appears in the three Johannine epistles. John 15 accounts for approximately 73% of the usage of the word, which illustrates the importance of fruit-bearing in the discourse of John 15.

Before examining the meaning of fruit in John 15, the word fruit first occurs in John 4. After the woman left her waterpot, the disciples returned with food and urged Jesus to eat. Jesus was all-consumed with his mission, which he stated was “to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). Speaking with a sense of urgency, he added, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! 36 And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together”(John 4:35-36). The white field ready for harvest points to the Samaritans who were ripe for salvation. Jesus’ ministry in Samaria yielded so much that “many of the Samaritans of

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ Rosscup comments on the use of fruits in Scripture: “Scripture itself uses the concept of fruit with a frequency that is impressive. The main Old Testament word, *peri*, appears not less than 106 times, and Young lists eleven other Hebrew words which denote various aspects of meaning relating to fruit.1 *Karpos*, the chief New Testament word, occurs about 66 times, and there are other terms such as *genēma* and *Orora*. Then related variations exist, like *akarpos* (unfruitful). The significance of fruit in the thinking of New Testament writers becomes apparent when one finds that 24 of the 27 books refer to the idea in some clear way.” James E. Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC* 125 (Jan 1968), 56.

that city believed in Him” (John 4:39). Even more, after staying two extra days, “many more believed because of His own word” (John 4:41).⁶⁶⁰

If the white field represented Samaria, fruit in this context must have something to do with the converts who responded to the message of Jesus and the witness of the Samaritan woman.⁶⁶¹ Concerning this assumption, Story notes that “‘fruit’ refers to the Samaritans, for they have received eternal life through the person of Jesus.”⁶⁶² Further, “Jesus had sown the seed of faith in the lone Samaritan woman, and now, Jesus asks his disciples to help harvest the fruit of that seed in the townspeople when they stream out to him at the well (4.38).”⁶⁶³ The joint venture between the Sower and the harvester lead to the experience of “joy over the harvest of fruit.”⁶⁶⁴ The “word ‘joy’ (χαρά) joins with ‘harvest’ (θερισμός) and ‘fruit’ (καρπός)”⁶⁶⁵ to describe a missionary endeavor which culminated in a joyful “harvest of fruit (people).”⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁰ In the Synoptic parables, the imagery of harvest pictures judgment, sometimes with an emphasis on sorting or dividing the crop into what is to be kept and what is to be discarded (e.g., Matt 13:24-30), and elsewhere with an emphasis on the abundance of the crop (e.g., Mark 4:8). In John the emphasis falls rather on the imminence of the harvesttime, which is pictured primarily as a time for the ingathering of "fruit" from the mission of God in and through Jesus; so too Jesus "gathers together" the scattered children of God (11:52). Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 109.

⁶⁶¹ Commenting on this, Rosscup agrees that fruits are “Converts through one’s witness.” He adds, “Jesus, after conversing with the needy woman at the well, discerned that the primary concern of His disciples was for personal physical needs rather than the spiritual need of others (John 4). He seized the golden opportunity to share with them His own sense of priority, which elevated the Father’s interest above all.” Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC*, 65.

⁶⁶² Story, “The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17),” *JPT*, 172.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Although he limits the missional aspect of “fruit”, Charles R. Smith admits at least that John 4:36 refers to soul winning in the following comments: “But what is this fruit? A popular conception, frequently heard in testimonies, is that a Christian’s sole purpose is to win souls and that soul-winning is therefore the fruit bearing for which a Christian is responsible. But of the sixty-six times the word fruit is used in the New Testament, only one verse uses it for soul-winning (John 4:36). The other non-literal usages of the word all refer to spiritual fruit; the fruit of the Spirit, or the fruits of righteousness which are the general result of the Holy Spirit’s work in and through

The second use of the word “fruit” occurs in John 12. After certain Greeks came to Philip intending to see Jesus (John 12:20-21), Jesus responded to their quest by saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:23-24). According to Jesus, the salvation of people, contingent on his death on the cross (the death of a grain of wheat), would lead to the salvation of many souls (production of much grain). This saying “about ‘seed’ and ‘fruit’ in Jn 12.24 also emerges within a missionary context, prompted by the Greeks’ request to see Jesus (Jn 12.21). The metaphor is clear. Jesus’ upcoming death brings life to all (Jn 12.32; 8.28; 3.12–15 for the metaphor of lifting – Num. 21.9).⁶⁶⁷

A closer look shows a link between the two passages considered above. “In both Jn 4:36 and 12:24, ‘fruit’ refers to people in a missionary context of salvific concern. John 4:36 brings out the element of ‘joy’; 12:24 emphasizes other elements, *i.e.*, the necessity of Jesus’ death so as to bear much fruit and thereby glorify the Father.”⁶⁶⁸

the believer. These “fruits” are primarily attitudes produced in the believer. These attitudes are of course, manifested in the believer’s actions.” Charles R. Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” *GJ* 9 (Spring 1968), 13.

⁶⁶⁷ Story, “The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17),” *JPT*, 173.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. Concerning the extent of the reaches of the scope of the fruitfulness of Christ’s death, Rainbow writes: John’s strong language strikes down any mirage of limits where the fruit of Christ’s death is concerned. Jesus gave his flesh for the life of “the world” (Jn 6:51). He died “for the nation,” and not for the Jewish nation only, but “to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn 11:52; cf. 18:14). As a grain drops into the earth and dies, he bears a rich harvest (Jn 12:24). Lifted up from the earth, he draws “all people” (πάντας) to himself (Jn 12:32), with reference in this context to Greeks as well as Hebrews (Jn 12:20-22). That he is the propitiation not only for “our” sins but also for the whole world (1 Jn 2:2) probably is to be understood in the same way as John 11:52 just quoted, but from the perspective of the Christian community rather than ethnic Israel: there are other children of God in the world who have yet to be gathered into the community of believers, for whom Jesus Christ made propitiation. The Lamb has taken people out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and he has made them a kingdom and priests to God (Apoc 5:9-10). The atonement is universal in range, in that every fair feature that constitutes the cosmos is amply represented in the microcosmos of the redeemed. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 220-221.

Fruits in the Context of John 15

As already established, John 15 accounts for a preponderance of the usage of the word “fruit” in the Johannine literature, underscoring the importance and relationship between “abiding” and “fruit bearing.” Teleologically, every branch in the vine has only one expectation, bearing fruit. Further, the vinedresser relates to the components according to their fruitfulness or fruitlessness. Fruitless branches are removed (αἶρει), whereas fruitful branches are pruned (καθαίρει).

Despite the numerous uses of “fruit” in John 15, Bultmann is correct that “the nature of the fruit-bearing is not expressly stated.”⁶⁶⁹ The passage does not clearly define the meaning of “fruit.” We know from the two previous usages in John 4 and 12 that fruit stands for “people” or “converts” who are the results of the missionary endeavors of the disciples (chap 4) and the consequences of Jesus’ death and resurrection (chap. 12). The question remains whether there is any continuity or discontinuity between John 4/12 and John 15 in the use of “fruit.”

Another observation before we investigate the meaning of “fruit” in this context. From carefully reading this section, one notices “that there are degrees in fruit-bearing.”⁶⁷⁰ John begins from “fruit” (καρπὸν, v. 2) to “more fruits” (καρπὸν πλείονα, v. 2), and “much fruit” (καρπὸν πλὴν, 15:5, 8). If anything, these seem to suggest an ever-expanding room for fruit-bearing at every stage of discipleship.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁹ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 532.

⁶⁷⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. “Abiding in Christ,” *EMJ* 4 (Winter 1995), 149.

⁶⁷¹ Johnson links this to the parable of the sower in the Gospel of Mark. He writes, “The three grades remind one of the three grades in Mark 4:20, “And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.” The similarity may be intentional.” *Ibid.*

In his survey of the word “fruit” in the NT, Rosscup observes that “fruit is actually a many-splendored thing”⁶⁷² that “can appear in aspects and forms with as many reference points as life itself.”⁶⁷³ For him, preeminently, it means Christ-like⁶⁷⁴ that exhibits love (vs. 9), joy (vs. 11), obedience (vs. 14), and peace (14:27).⁶⁷⁵ “Each of these, in essence, is an attitude characterized by the very nature of Christ’s life, just as the grapes of a vine are permeated by the very life-essence within the vine itself.”⁶⁷⁶ Similarly, Newbigin writes that since fruit is “not an artifact of the disciples... It is the life of Jesus himself reproduced in the lives of the disciples in the midst of the life of the world.” Thus, the “presence of fruit is the visible evidence of the fact that the branch is part of the vine.”⁶⁷⁷

Robert P. Martin agrees with Newbigin and Rosscup that “branches bear fruit only when they remain in vital union with the vine that gives them life.”⁶⁷⁸ He frames, however, the fruits in this context as “consistent obedience and practical holiness and effective service in his kingdom only to the degree that they remain in vital communion with him.”⁶⁷⁹ There is no disagreement

⁶⁷² Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC*, 62.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.* He cites John 15 and Galatians 5, and other vital texts are Ephesians 5:8–13, James 3:17–18, and 2 Peter 1:3–11.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 197. On a similar note, Rosscup writes, “It is clear, then, that the believer is the recipient and channel of a God-imparted life, and fruit originates in this life. Evidently it is correct to understand the nature of fruit, at least partially, in terms of its source. It denotes the gracious dispositions and characteristics which the Spirit produces as He makes good the very life-essence of Christ within and out of the Christian. It can thus refer to out-lived acts when these are permeated by God’s in-lived qualities. It can, even designate people a Christian has led to Christ since they, too, are Spirit-given “products” of his witness.” Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC*, 59.

⁶⁷⁸ Robert P. Martin, “Christ, The True Vine John 15:1-11,” *RBTR* 5 (Jul 2008), 6.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

with Rosscup and Newbiggin since love, joy, and obedience are part and parcel of practical holiness. By defining fruit as “effective service,” Martin forges John 15 with 4:36 and 12:24.

In what sense could identifying “fruit” from a missionary perspective be defensible in John 15? Rainbow shows the link between “practical holiness” and effective service. He notes,

God is glorified when Jesus’ disciples “bear much fruit” as Jesus has appointed them to do (Jn 15:8, 16). “Fruit” in this context denotes first of all love as the sum of God’s commandments. This we see from the juxtaposition of “bearing much fruit” in John 15:8 with abiding in Jesus’ love by keeping his commandments in John 15:9-10, and from the framing of “I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” in John 15:16 between statements of the love command (Jn 15:12, 17). But the effect of practicing love in the community of disciples will be that the world will know and some will believe (Jn 13:35; 17:21, 23). The moral fruit that is love, itself becomes fruitful in the form of more and more converts (cf. “fruit” in Jn 4:36; 12:24).⁶⁸⁰

Rainbow further maintains correctly that there is no real bifurcation between “fruit” as character and service. He writes,

Like the sap that courses through a vine, the Spirit energizes Jesus’ disciples, making them fruitful. Fruit in this context (Jn 15:2, 4, 5, 8, 16) is both ethical in nature and missional. It consists of love for one another in the circle of disciples (Jn 15:12-17) and of bearing witness to the world (Jn 15:18-27). These are not two kinds of fruit, but one: it is by loving one another that Jesus’ disciples bear their most cogent witness to others (Jn 13:35; 17:23). Abiding also brings about fellowship with Christ in his suffering, his being rejected by a hostile world (Jn 15:18–16:4), and leads to effective mission (Jn 15:27–16:15), peace (Jn 14:27; 16:33) and joy (Jn 15:11; 16:16-33).⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 411. Similarly, Rosscup argues that care must be taken not to sever the connection between bearing fruit as “character” and “service.” He writes, “The Christian should realize that fruit as character and fruit as witness do not exist in an either/or relationship but rather in a both/and unity. After all, it makes sense to ask, what Christian character could there be without Christian characters? One can be sinful in rationalizing: “I am relieved to learn that fruit can be many things in addition to soul-winning; I will bear my fruit in these areas and leave the witnessing part to others.” For, how can the Christian excuse himself in light of the inseparable connection that must exist between his love and his obedience to Christ’s heart concerns (John 14:21; 15:9–14)? The one who lives truly in the love of the Spirit will be sensitive to the heart-beat of the Christ who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).” Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC*, 65.

⁶⁸¹ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 411.

In summary, “fruit” in the Johannine literature “is both ethical in nature and missional.”⁶⁸² The ethical dimension of love (John 15:9, 12), obedience⁶⁸³, and joy (John 15:11) could all be summed up as Christlikeness.⁶⁸⁴ Missionally, a demonstration of practical holiness exemplified by love (John 13:35) and all the fullness of the character of Christ leads to knowledge and belief in Christ (Jn 17:21, 23). Therefore, in our quest for evidence of assurance of salvation, the inextricable link between discipleship and fruit-bearing provides a lens to assess claims of a genuine assurance of salvation.

To his inner circle, Jesus makes a poignant statement, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be [γένησθε, lit., ‘become’] my disciples” (John 15:8). Notice that “the disciples whom Jesus was addressing were “already made clean” by his word (Jn 15:3) and had stuck with him when others apostatized (Jn 6:66-71). Yet it remained for them to become his disciples indeed. This they would do by bearing fruit.”⁶⁸⁵ Fruit-bearing, therefore, is a litmus test.

Epistemologically, other commentators and scholars agree that the litmus test of discipleship is fruit-bearing in the context of John's Gospel. In her commentary on the gospel of John, Thompson writes that “disciples are known by the lives they live, particularly as they

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ The imperatives on John 15:4, and 9 calls for obedience. Such obedience could also be tagged as remaining in his words. :Jesus’s words are to remain in the disciples—showing that “remaining in Jesus is synonymous with remaining in Jesus’s word (cf. 8:31), just as here Jesus’s words remaining in the disciples is synonymous with Jesus remaining in them (cf. v 5).” Searles, “These Things I Have Said To You,” *JETS*, 60 (Sep 2017), 518 .

⁶⁸⁴ “Abiding in Christ,” “walking in the Spirit,” “Spirit-filled,” and “allowing the word of Christ to dwell in you richly,” are all phrases that denote the same thing: remaining determined to be obediently Christ-minded.” Tucker, “The Inevitability of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis Of John 15:6,” *JODT*, 15 (Aug 2011), 60.

⁶⁸⁵ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 314. Rainbow adds “By abiding in the vine, his disciples become fruitful in love and in the keeping of his commandments (Jn 15:1-17). Fidelity to him sets them apart from the world (Jn 15:18–16:4; 17:14, 16, 25; 1 Jn 3:1; 5:19; Apoc 14:4; 18:4.” Ibid., 368.

reflect the character and will of the one whom they follow (13:34-35)."⁶⁸⁶ This is unavoidable because "abundant fruit is the product of the life that flows through the branch, enabled by the care that the vinedresser, the Father, has given the branches."⁶⁸⁷ Thompson even makes a more vigorous assertion, "the presence of fruit is the *visible evidence* of the fact that the branch is part of the vine." Hence, Jesus' exhortation, "Abide in me."⁶⁸⁸ In a similar vein, Robert P. Martin asks,

What is the evidence of vital communion with Christ? Shall we look for "mystic flights of subjective experience" or for something more tangible? Certainly, increasing fellowship with Christ brings greater measures of joy and love and peace in the inner man; but as wonderful as these things are, this is not the evidence of communion with himself that Christ here promises. He says, "He that abides in me, and I in him, this one bears much fruit." If we are right in interpreting the word "fruit" in terms of fruitfulness in godly living and service, Jesus here is saying that a prominent proof of fellowship with himself is fruitfulness in these things. Those who draw near to him and abide in him will bear holy fruit.⁶⁸⁹

Although John A. Tucker argues that the unfruitful branches in John 15:2 are given further care by the Father rather than chopped off,⁶⁹⁰ he acknowledges that fruits must be evident in the life of a disciple. Even for Tucker, remaining in Jesus, as stated in verses 7-10, "is to let his words remain in us, i.e., to heed them and to live by them (v. 7; cf. Rev. 1:3). It is to live *in the love of Jesus* (v. 9), i.e., to be ever conscious of that love, rejoice in it, depend on it, and do

⁶⁸⁶ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 326.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 325. The emphasis is mine.

⁶⁸⁹ Martin, "Christ, The True Vine John 15:1-11," *RBTR*, 14.

⁶⁹⁰ He writes the following about the unfruitful branch, "Verse two does not figuratively contrast the disciples with other people who had falsely professed their belief in Christ, as some would suppose. It also does not contrast the disciples with other true disciples who refuse to bear fruit and need to be removed in the form of some disciplinary judgment, as others would suppose. It rather describes some who are in Him, yet are not yet able to bear fruit until they further mature by maintaining a close communion by abiding in Him. These people are encouraged and stimulated when the Father "lifts (them) up" to allow them to mature further." Tucker, "The Inevitability of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis Of John 15:6," *JODT*, 15 (Aug 2011), 54.

nothing to grieve it. It is to live *in obedience* to the Lover (v. 10) since that shows the genuineness of our own responsive love.”⁶⁹¹ Disciples, according to Tucker, “are called to be productive,” but the “ultimate product of fruit-bearing is love (v. 17); that is the fruit that most delight the Lord.”⁶⁹²

Inevitability of Fruit-Bearing

Ryle writes one of the most robust languages about the inevitability of fruit-bearing. According to Ryle, “No one can be a branch in Christ, and a living member of His body, who does not bear fruit.” He contends that “vital union with Christ not evidenced by life is an impossibility and a blasphemous idea.”⁶⁹³ Similarly, in his Commentary on the Gospel, John Calvin adds, “Can anyone who is ingrafted into Christ be without fruit? I answer many are supposed to be in the Vine, according to the opinion of men, who actually have no root in the Vine.... By these words He declares that all who have a living root in him are fruit-bearing branches.”⁶⁹⁴ Barton says, “So, one should not consider himself to be a branch of the Vine just because he is a Jew. Rather, is the test a matter of bearing “fruit” (15:2). Indeed, many professed to believe in Jesus who really did not (see 2:23–25). These nonfruit-bearing ‘branches’ the Cultivator would remove.”⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² George R. Beasley-Murray, “John 13-17: The Community of True Life,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988): 479.

⁶⁹³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), John 10:10 to end, p. 335.

⁶⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), II, 108–9.

⁶⁹⁵ V. Wayne Barton, *The Gospel of John*, Shield Bible Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 73.

Another conservative commentator, George Hutcheson, writes, “By their fruitfulness or unfruitfulness they declare themselves to be true or counterfeit branches, and to be really, or in show only, engrafted in Christ... The true touchstone whereby to discern one sort of branches from another is, not their leaves or profession, but their fruit.”⁶⁹⁶ Charles R. Smith poignantly sums up the inevitability of fruit-bearing. He says, “True Life is evidenced by fruit. Where there is no fruit, there is no Life. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 7:15–20 (AV):

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.⁶⁹⁷

Abiding in the Epistles

John’s use of the concept of abiding will be summarized in eight points. First, John states that genuine believers abide in God ((2:6; 3:24a; 4:13, 15, 16) and provides four ways of verifying if mutual abiding exists between the believer and God. First, the one who abides in him keeps “His commandments” (3:24).⁶⁹⁸ Second, since the Spirit is “the mark of God’s indwelling, given to those who belong to the community of faith and obedience”⁶⁹⁹ those who abide in God have His Spirit (4:13). Third, God abides in the one who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (4:15). Fourth, the one who remains in love abides in God (4:16).

⁶⁹⁶ George Hutcheson, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Puritan Classic Series (Evansville, Indiana: The Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959), p. 314.

⁶⁹⁷ Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” *GJ*, 09(Spring 1968), 14.

⁶⁹⁸ *Jobes, I, 2, & 3 John*, 169.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

Apart from describing the four ways to verify if mutual abiding exists between God and the believer, he also shows how those who abide in Him must walk. He says that “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (2:6). This is John’s way of introducing Jesus as a role model for the believer.⁷⁰⁰ Further, it is a summon to examine whether a person’s behavior is consistent with the requirement to walk as Jesus walked.⁷⁰¹

Second, believers abide in the light, according to John (2:10). This reinforces the concept of staying in God since “to remain in the light means to remain in God, who is light.”⁷⁰² To remain in the light also entails loving one’s brother. Just as “love enables a man to walk in the light; hatred leaves him in the dark.”⁷⁰³ Third, the concept of abiding also describes the believer who does the will of God and therefore endures forever (2:17). Whereas the word is transient and fading “The man who has taken God as the center of his life has given himself to the things which last forever.”⁷⁰⁴

Fourth, 2:19 This verse describes the secessionists who left the Christian community.⁷⁰⁵ Barclay remarks, “they were aliens and their own conduct had shown it to be so.”⁷⁰⁶ Fifth, John entreats the believers to let the apostles’ teachings abide in them (2:24). Kobe sees this as a “call

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁰¹ Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 12.

⁷⁰² Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 197.

⁷⁰³ Barclays, *The Letters of John and Jude*, 49.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Summary of the identity of these Christian secessionists. (1) Gnostic Christians (2) Docetist Christians (3) Christians who believed that the man Jesus was a completely different being than the Christ-spirit which descended on Jesus at his baptism and left him prior to his crucifixion. (4) Christians who exalted the role of the Holy Spirit as a source of spiritual knowledge to the point of devaluing Jesus human ministry and atoning death (5) Jewish Christians who departed the Christian community and renounced faith in Christ to return to the synagogue.” Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 125.

⁷⁰⁶ Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, 65.

to remain in the truth, which is the only way to remain in God."⁷⁰⁷ On the other hand, "the imperative followed by a third-class conditional sentence provides both the instruction and its justification, or need. With this and the following verse, we will see that the believers' abiding in God's word reveals that he abides in the Son and Father and is experiencing eternal life."⁷⁰⁸

Sixth, *mēno* describes the Holy Spirit who abides with believers (2:27) . He refers to the Spirit as the "anointing."⁷⁰⁹ Seventh, believers remaining in Jesus is set forth as the antidote to not sinning (3:6). John "is now describing an obedient believer, not just *a* believer but the opposite of the lawless man."⁷¹⁰ He does this by way of contrast between sinning and abiding. "They are opposites. One cannot sin and abide. One cannot abide and sin."⁷¹¹

Eight, 'the one not abiding in love abides in Death (3:14). The Spirit quickens and gives life (John 6:63) from spiritual Death to life. However, the one who does not love his brother still "abides in death" (6:63). "Death here is not a future event but refers to the realm into which the fall in the garden of Eden has put us all. Their failure to love characterizes the realm of Death and is equivalent to being in darkness"⁷¹²

Derickson expresses the epistemic value of this instruction with the cogent question, "How can they know they are walking in the sphere of life, just as they were to walk in light?" In

⁷⁰⁷ *Jobes, 1, 2, & 3 John*, 130. Karen writes further "It is not enough to believe the gospel at one point and then to develop ones own theology beyond it. Only those who remain within the teaching of the apostles about Jesus Christ can have an assurance of eternal life because only those who continue to embrace that message will remain in the sun and in the father." *Ibid*

⁷⁰⁸ Gary W. Derickson, *EEC: 1, 2 & 3 John*. Gen. Ed. H. Wayne House (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 244.

⁷⁰⁹ *Jobes, 1, 2, & 3 John*, 132.

⁷¹⁰ Derickson, *EEC: 1, 2 & 3 John*, 304.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*.

⁷¹² *Jobes, 1, 2, & 3 John*, 156.

response, "they know when they see life in action through their love of their Christian brothers."⁷¹³ Love for one another, therefore, becomes the litmus test of abiding in the light. "But there is always the possibility, and in John's community the apparent recent reality, of believers given ostensible assent to Christian faith but not matching it with agapic expression toward those around them. John reminds them what a grating inconcinnity this is."⁷¹⁴ Further, "Whatever else they may claim . . . , they basically deceive themselves about their state of salvation."⁷¹⁵

Ninth, John continues that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them (3:15). This "is self-evident" since God's saving promise is "the assured possession of those who love others."⁷¹⁶ Schreiner and Caneday rightly comment, "Once again John could scarcely be clearer. Those who love have already entered the age to come, whereas those who hate and murder are not Christians."⁷¹⁷ Tenth, God's love does not abide in one who refuses to meet the needs of other believers (3:17). "Those who do not love have not passed out of the realm of death into the realm of life, which is characterized by love for the brothers/sisters and arises out of being loved by God."⁷¹⁸ Abiding in love becomes evident in meeting the needs of other believers.

⁷¹³ Derickson, *EEC: 1, 2 & 3 John*, 346.

⁷¹⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 201.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid. Derickson argues that "Love of other Christians has no salvific (justification) value." Rather, he considers love as work with sanctification value. Further he continues, "Yes, assurance may result from actively loving other believers. Yet it remains illegitimate to conclude that one is unregenerate if he or she fails to love other believers" (ibid). This seems contradictory to John's tenor of thinking in this context which clearly suggests that failure to love indicates abiding in death.

⁷¹⁶ Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 202.

⁷¹⁷ Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 287.

⁷¹⁸ John Painter, *1, 2, AND 3 John*, Sacra Pagina, Ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 242.

In summary, just as disciples are commanded to abide in the vine in the gospel (John 15:1-17), the epistles equally weigh in on abiding. Continuity is vital in the Gospel and the Epistle since the relationship between Christ and believers “is not mechanical but living and reciprocal.”⁷¹⁹ The epistles provide clear indicators of a vital mutual abiding relationship, summarized as love and obedience.

⁷¹⁹ Ardel B. Caneday, “Persevering in Christ and Tests of Eternal Life,” *SBJT* 10 (Fall 2006), 50.

Chapter Five Summary And Conclusion

The conclusion from the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Survey

The data examined from the Johannine literature indicates that the combination of complete confidence in what Christ has accomplished and the confirmatory contingent empirical characteristics verifiable from what the Spirit is achieving in the life of believers provide grounds for assurance of salvation. Stated differently, Rainbow states correctly that “John does not base assurance of salvation solely on what Christ did for the believer, but also finds confirmation in what the Spirit is doing in the believer.”⁷²⁰

The terse historical survey in chapter one traces the role of God’s predestinarian will and the inner witness of the Spirit in assuring believers of salvation. Whereas for many English Puritans and their heirs, “assurance of salvation was based on the direct witness of the Spirit in an individual’s life,”⁷²¹ Augustinianism grounded assurance on predestination. Grounding assurance in either predestination or the internal witness of the Spirit undercuts any external epistemological quest for justifications at least in two ways.

First, the inscrutability of God’s predestinarian will leads to uncertainty. While it is true that “the Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19), his predestinarian will remains inscrutable. Consequently, the council of Trent anathematized in Canon 15 that “If anyone says that a man who has been reborn and justified is bound by faith to believe that he is certainly in

⁷²⁰ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 348. Instead of two legs of assurance, Schreiner and Caneday ground assurance of salvation on (1) God’s promises (2) the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and (3) the witness of the Holy Spirit. Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 276.

⁷²¹ Noll, “John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance,” *BSAC*, 164.

the number of the predestined, let him be anathema.”⁷²² For Trent, only divine revelation makes God’s inscrutable will knowable.⁷²³

Second, since the inner witness of the Spirit is not subject to external validation and assessment, most of the Reformers and their heirs turned to confirmatory external epistemic justifications for assurance. Commenting on 1 John 3:19-20, Luther maintains that “the consciousness of a life well spent is the *assurance* that we are keeping the faith, *for it is through works that we learn that our faith is true.*”⁷²⁴ Similarly, Calvin⁷²⁵ and the Puritans turned to the practical syllogism, which Ferguson summarizes as “high degrees of Christian assurance are simply not compatible with low levels of obedience. If Christ is not actually saving us, producing in us the obedience of faith in our struggle against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, then our confidence that he is our Savior is bound to be undermined, imperceptibly at first, but really.”⁷²⁶ Even from the other side of the theological spectrum, Jacob Arminius accepted that “the inward testimony of the Spirit and the fruits of faith impart assurance to the believer.”⁷²⁷ Beeke is right that “Scripture, the Reformers, and post-Reformation men repeatedly offer the reminder that personal assurance of salvation *is recognizable by its fruits.*”⁷²⁸

⁷²² *The Church Teaches*, 244.

⁷²³ Canon 16 stated: “If anyone says that he has absolute and infallible certitude that he will certainly have the great gift of final perseverance, without having learned this from a special revelation: let him be anathema.” *Ibid.*

⁷²⁴ Luther, *Lectures on the First Epistle of John*, 238. Emphasis is mine. Quoted from Christopher D. Bass *That You May Know*, ed. E Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 27. Electronic Edition.

⁷²⁵ David B. McWilliams, “Calvin’s Theology of Certainty” in Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey G. Waddington, ed. *Resurrection and Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 525-526.

⁷²⁶ Ferguson. *The Whole Christ*, 172.

⁷²⁷ Noll, “John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance,” *BSAC*, 164.

⁷²⁸ Beeke, “Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith?” *TMSJ*, 44. Emphasis is his.

Therefore, since God's predestinarian will and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit are not amenable to external verification, a way of assessing claims of assurance of salvation in this dissertation is by measuring such claims against the exterior verifiable characterizations of those in a saving relationship with God, as defined, and described by the Johannine literature. After examining the Johannine corpus, (1) the believing test, (2) the new birth test, (3) the discipleship test, (4) the abiding test, (5) the keeping the word test, and (6) the overcomer's test emerged as the standards for measuring and validating claims of assurance of salvation.

The Conclusion from The Believing Test

The textual investigation of the Johannine literature shows that believing is an indispensable means of securing eternal life—only those who believe gain and maintain salvation. Therefore, any claim of assurance of salvation must be contingent on passing the believing test. Restating this, believing provides an epistemic standard for verifying any claim of assurance of salvation. The object of faith in the Johannine context is Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30). This involves believing (1) in His name⁷²⁹ and (2) in Him.⁷³⁰ Further, this encompasses (1) receiving him (1:12), (2) coming to him,⁷³¹ (3) giving credence to his words⁷³²(4) believing his works (10:38), (5) believing in the Father (14:1) He came to reveal (6) and obeying him by acting on his word (4:50).

⁷²⁹ John 1:12; 2:23.

⁷³⁰ John 2:11; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 40, 47; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45, 48; 12:37, 42, 44; 17:20.

⁷³¹ John 5:40; 6:35, 37, 44-45, 65; 7:37.

⁷³² John 2:22; 4:50.

John contrasts believers who continue believing and believers who abandon their belief. Only the former is classified as genuine believers. Thus, “initial reception of the gospel is no sure indicator that faith will endure and prove to be genuine.”⁷³³ What signifies genuineness is the duration of faith. True faith is an ongoing attitude⁷³⁴ where a person “who believes enters a permanent state.”⁷³⁵ Since genuine faith is an ongoing experience, “failure to persevere uncovers belief to be temporary, inadequate and insincere.”⁷³⁶ In light of the evidence, living in a state of continuous belief provides an epistemic justification for assurance of salvation.

The Conclusion from the New Birth Test

This research shows that John presents the new birth as a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of God.⁷³⁷ Since this dissertation suggests that entering the kingdom of God is equivalent to having eternal life, the new birth becomes another epistemic standard for evaluating any claim of assurance of salvation. Evidentially, the data demonstrates that whereas the work of the Spirit in the person born anew is invisible, the external evidence of the new birth is discernible⁷³⁸ as it “is revealed by its effects.”⁷³⁹ This new spiritual life⁷⁴⁰ “is a thorough change of heart, will, and character. It is a resurrection. It is a new creation. It is passing from

⁷³³ Schreiner & Caneday *The Race Set Before Us*, 221.

⁷³⁴ Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. II, 49-50.

⁷³⁵ Morris, “Faith” in *NBD* 367.

⁷³⁶ Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 221.

⁷³⁷ McCabe, “Born Of Water And The Spirit” *DBSJ*, 86.

⁷³⁸ Thompson, *John A Commentary*, 83.

⁷³⁹ Phillips, *John Volume 1: Chapters 1-10*, 155.

⁷⁴⁰ McCabe, “Born Of Water And The Spirit,” *DBSJ*, 90.

death to life. It is the implanting in our dead hearts a new principle from above.”⁷⁴¹ Philip rightly provides a fitting conclusion. “According to the Bible” he writes, “if we have not been changed, we have not been born again, regardless of any spiritual experiences that we think we have had.”⁷⁴²

Whereas the Gospel describes the nature of the new birth, 1 John highlights the evidence of the new birth, namely, doing righteousness (1 John 2:29); not committing sin (1 John 3:9); loving (1 John 4:7); believing that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:4); keeping oneself from sin (1 John 5:18). Righteous lifestyle then is the distinguishing mark of those born anew.⁷⁴³ In addition, righteous living acts as the watershed that separates the children of God and the children of the devil.⁷⁴⁴ For the writer of the epistles of John, continuing or habitually living in unrighteousness belies and nullifies any basis of a claim of assurance of salvation.⁷⁴⁵ As Jones writes, “The writer remains consistent about the absence of sin as the pattern of living for a believer, though he constantly makes provisions for believers who do sin.”⁷⁴⁶

The Conclusion from the Test of Discipleship

An examination of the concept of discipleship in John 6 and 8 collapses any artificial distinction between a genuine believer and a disciple. Since “the call to faith and discipleship

⁷⁴¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thought on the Gospels: John*, 3 Vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 1:122.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 122.

⁷⁴⁴ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 123.

⁷⁴⁵ Johnson, *1, 2 AND 3 John*, NIBC, 74.

⁷⁴⁶ Jones, *1, 2 & 3 John*, SHBC, 231.

are the same and cannot be separated,”⁷⁴⁷ a believer and a disciple describe the same reality.”⁷⁴⁸ John 6 shows that whereas superficial, non-committed, spurious, or temporal disciples exhibit unbelief (6:64) and abandon Jesus along the way (6:66), true disciples will be characterized by (1) a belief in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God (6:70) and (2) clinging to him as the one who has the words of life (6:68). Stated differently, a genuine disciple “is a committed, continuing follower of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴⁹

The evidence from John 8:31 clarifies the nature of the continuity John 6 suggests. An examination of John 8:31 lends itself to the conclusion that anyone who truly believes will continue, particularly, in the words of Jesus. While Beasley-Murray characterizes continuity in the word as “the primary duty of a believer” and “the mark of a real disciple,”⁷⁵⁰ Klink calls it “the mood of existence for the Christian.”⁷⁵¹ As “faith lays hold of salvation; continuation in Jesus’ word completes it.”⁷⁵²

In conclusion, the textual analysis of the Johannine literature suggests that since all genuine believers are disciples, continuity in the words of Jesus is an external epistemic justification of assurance. This continuity builds on the reality that Jesus distinguishes between entry into Faith and genuine discipleship. Not an ephemeral profession, but rather unwavering remaining in his word, is the condition for authenticity.⁷⁵³ In conclusion, whereas a “disciple

⁷⁴⁷ J. Wallis, “Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience,” *Sojourners* (March 1976), 21.

⁷⁴⁸ Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 65.

⁷⁴⁹ David E. Lanier, “The Multiplication of Disciples,” *FM*, 16 (Spring 1999), 8 .

⁷⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC, 133.

⁷⁵¹ Klink III, *John*, 414.

⁷⁵² Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 314.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

acknowledges the truth about Jesus, a true disciple does what he says”⁷⁵⁴ and continues in Jesus’ word.

The conclusion from the Abiding Test

The Johannine corpus places the locus of spiritual life in Christ (Jn 1:4). Hence, for spiritual life to exist in a person, there must be a continuous, uninterrupted flow of life between Christ and the person. To separate from Christ is to disconnect from the source of spiritual life, which leads to fruitlessness and its concomitant adverse eschatological consequences.⁷⁵⁵

Therefore, believers are characterized as those who abide in Christ.

The data suggests that fruit-bearing is inevitable external evidence of abiding in Christ. Fruitfulness in this context represents Christlikeness⁷⁵⁶ or constant obedience and practical holiness⁷⁵⁷ which is the “life of Jesus himself reproduced in the lives of the disciples in the midst of the life of the world.”⁷⁵⁸ Fruit-bearing is not optional as it marks “genuine followers of Jesus and separates them from those whose end is destruction.”⁷⁵⁹ Consequently, in light of the evidence from the Johannine literature, fruit-bearing, which is an inevitable indication of remaining in Christ provides epistemic validation of assurance of salvation.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Story, “The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17),” *JPT*, 168.

⁷⁵⁶ Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament,” *BSAC*, 62. He cites John 15 and Galatians 5, and other vital texts are Ephesians 5:8–13, James 3:17–18, and 2 Peter 1:3–11. Also see Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 411.

⁷⁵⁷ Martin, “Christ, The True Vine John 15:1-11,” *RBTR*, 6.

⁷⁵⁸ Newbiggin, *The Light Has Come*, 197.

⁷⁵⁹ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 301.

The Conclusion from Keeping the Word Test

An examination of the Johannine literature leads to some conclusions with regard to keeping the Word. First, since Jesus is “the Word of God”⁷⁶⁰ who embodies the Father’s message, believing in Him includes receiving and keeping His Word. This faith in Jesus implies obedience to all He “teaches and prescribes as his commandments.”⁷⁶¹ The writer indicates that Jesus expected his (1) words to be believed (Jn 5:24), (2) words to abide in disciples or believers,⁷⁶² (3) disciples to continue in his words (Jn 8:31), (4) words to be understood (Jn 8:43), (5) words to be kept.⁷⁶³ To emphasize the significance of obedience, the author forges a link between obedience and the assurance of the future immortal life (John 8:51). The promise of avoiding death is for only those “who keep and observe his word.”⁷⁶⁴ Truly then, there is no basis of assurance for anyone who does not keep the words of Jesus.

Second, the importance of obedience in the Johannine literature additionally comes out in the author’s definition of love, which provides another epistemic yardstick for assessing claims of assurance. First, he presents mutual love as the cord that binds the Father/Son and believers (John 14:21-24). Subsequently, he defines this love as obedience and identifies those in this mutual relationship with God as the ones who have and keep His commandments. Since John

⁷⁶⁰ John. 1:1; Revelation 19:13.

⁷⁶¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Christian Morality According to John, 191. Keener adds: “Faith involves obedience (3:36; cf. Acts 5:32; Rom 1:5; 2:8; 6:16-17; 15:18; 16:19, 26; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:17). Jesus always obeys his Father’s commands (8:29), including the command to face death (10:18; 14:31); his disciples must follow his model of obedience to his commandments by loving one another sacrificially (13:34; 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12).”Keener, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2, p. 889.

⁷⁶²John 5:38; 8:37.

⁷⁶³ John 8:51-52, 55; 14:23-24.

⁷⁶⁴ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 2, 219.

defines love as obedience to Jesus' commandments,⁷⁶⁵ epistemologically, obedience is a genuine yardstick for assessing claims of love for God. Stated concisely, those in a saving relationship will have a mutual love relationship with God, which will be characterized by obedience. John contends that where there is no obedience, there is no love for God (Jn 14:24), notwithstanding verbal profession.

Third, besides love, since John links obedience to the motif of knowing God, obedience validates all claims to know God. Whereas the Gospel of John defines eternal life as knowing the Father and the Son (Jn 17:3), the Epistles of John provides tests to assess claims of knowing God. According to the epistles, "obedience is evidence that we have come to know Him."⁷⁶⁶ Thus, from the First Epistle of John, failure to keep God's commandments belies and denies any claim of knowing God (1Jn 2:4).

As in the Gospel and Epistles, the Book of Revelation presents obedience as the litmus test of God's people, at least from two dimensions. Firstly, the children of God are characterized as those who hear and heed the words (Rev. 1:3). Secondly, of all the signifiers of the external characteristics of God's people, Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 are among the clearest. In both passages, God's end-time people are characterized as the ones who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony/faith of Jesus Christ. In conclusion, anyone in a saving relationship with God will know and love Him. The external validation of knowing and loving God is obedience to His word. Any claim of assurance of salvation must be tested against obedience since keeping God's word is the epistemic yardstick for assessing and validating the claims.

⁷⁶⁵ David Rensberger, *1 John 2 John 3 John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 127. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, 166.

⁷⁶⁶ Kellum, "On the Semantic Structure of 1 John" *FM*, 42.

The Conclusion of Overcomers Test

The search for epistemic justification in the writings of John demonstrates that overcoming is a critical concept in the Johannine literature. In the Gospel and Epistles, just as Jesus has overcome⁷⁶⁷, the author argues that all Christians are overcomers (I Jn 5:4-5). Such overcomers will exhibit some “distinct characteristics of an authentically overcoming life,”⁷⁶⁸ which include “obedience, loving a brother, purifying the life, practicing righteousness, and being kept from the evil one (cf. 5:18).”⁷⁶⁹

In the Book of Revelation, overcoming is imperative for believers. John accomplishes this by contrasting the victory of the Lamb and the believers. Whereas the Lamb’s victory is a completed action in the past (Rev. 5:5), the call to the churches to overcome is a present ongoing reality for “God’s people living for him in a world of sin and oppression. They know that Christ has won the battle, but the war has not yet ended.”⁷⁷⁰ As already established, the gravity of the call to overcome is underscored by the fact that all the promises given to the churches are contingent on overcoming.⁷⁷¹

Specifically, John presents the devil and the world, which lies under “the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), as the objects of overcoming. The world offers the “lust of the flesh,”

⁷⁶⁷ John 16:33; Revelation 12:11.

⁷⁶⁸ James E. Rosscup, “The Overcomer of the Apocalypse,” *GTJ*, 2 (Fall 1982), 266-267.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.* The frequent present tense suggests an overall trend of life. This is not a set, static mold but dynamic. It allows for growth; it does not denote absolute, sinless perfection now! In fact, while John insists on marks of a Christian lifestyle for one who has eternal life, and even boldly claims that one who is born of God does not sin, he is aware that acts of sin can break into the experience of real Christians (1:9, 2:1, aorist tense twice; 3:3, implied possibility). But, while aggressive for a godly lifestyle, he shows that God in Christ has graciously made provision to forgive and cleanse sin when the one born of God does falter (1:7, 9; 2:1, 2). *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁰ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 560. Further he continues, Further, “every believer must fight daily against sin, the devil, and the world. And everyone who follows Christ receives the promise of eternal life and inherits all the good things that are coming (compare Heb. 10:1).”

⁷⁷¹ Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7.

“lust of the eyes,” and “pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16) in a most mesmerizing way to seduce believers to compromise their faith. Further in the Book of Revelation, believers are called to overcome letting their love flicker out (Rev 2:5), buckling under the fear of suffering and a possible martyr’s death (Rev 2:11), the seductions of compromise and inroads of corruption (Rev 2:12-29), spiritual lethargy and death (Rev 3:1-5) letting go of their crowns (Rev 3:11-12) and spiritual lukewarmness (Rev 3:14-21).

In conclusion, any claim of assurance must be epistemologically verified by the test of overcoming to be valid. Only those who are daily overcoming the devil and all his seductive ploys could have a legitimate basis for claiming assurance of salvation. Since non-overcomers are characterized as “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars” (Rev. 21:8), overcomers will practice a lifestyle of righteousness.⁷⁷²

Final Word

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation on the search for justifications for claims of assurance of salvation by approaching the issue from the perspective of the entire Johannine literature. The exegesis and textual examination of the relevant data in the Johannine corpus leads to the suggested logical conclusion that (1) believing, (2) new birth, (3) discipleship, (4) abiding, (5) obedience, and (6) overcoming provide epistemological criteria for validating claims of assurance. Claims of assurance are valid and biblically sound when they can

⁷⁷² Rainbow shares a similar view: “Salvation is gratuitous. Yet the one who will inherit the blessings of the new creation is “he who conquers.” Conquering involves keeping Christ’s works to the end (cf. Apoc 2:26). Those who fail to conquer are the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars, whose lot will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, the second death. Whether one pursues conduct befitting a disciple, or does not do so, is just as critical for individual destiny as is faith in Christ, for action is not separate from faith but rather is the very way that saving faith exists.” Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 315.

be epistemologically and experientially justified by these six epistemic textual standards. A person has genuine and valid claim of assurance when these external confirmatory verifications are present. On the other hand, a person holds to a false assurance when these validations are nonexistent. The absence of these external validations suggests the absence of genuine saving experience. In the absence of these external justifications, a person can still claim assurance of salvation, although, such claims cannot be sustained in light of the evidence from the Johannine literature.

For future research, the question below needs an investigation: How does the protestant doctrine of faith alone, when interpreted to mean that one is saved by faith alone square up with the other necessary confirmatory evidence of assurance of salvation in the Johannine literature? This is an inquiry that might require further studies in the future.

Bibliography

- Abbot, Edwin A. Abbott. *Johannine Vocabulary: A Comparison of the Words of the Fourth Gospel With Those of the Three*. London: A. and C. Black, 1905.
- Aldrich, R. L. "Some Simple Difficulties of Salvation," *BSAC* 111 (April-June 1954) 167.
- Anderson, David R. "The Nature of Faith," *CTSJ* (Sep 1999): 2-26.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica I-II, Q. 109, Art. 10*. translation of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger, 1947.
- Augustine. "Homilies on the Gospel of John," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Phillip Schaff, ed., 1st series, Volume VII.
- _____. *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance*.
<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105/npnf105.xxi.iii.xxxv.html>.
- Baker, Bruce A. "Complementary Hermeneutics And The Early Church," *JMT* 1 (Spring 2003): 27-68.
- Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975.
- _____. *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975.
- _____. *The Letters of John and Jude*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976.
- _____. *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976.
- _____. *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 2. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976

Barrett, C. K. *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. 2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978.

Barton, Wayne. *The Gospel of John*, Shield Bible Series. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965.

Bass, Christopher David. "A Johannine Perspective Of The Human Responsibility To Persevere In The Faith Through The Use Of $\mu\epsilon\nu\omega$ And Other Related Motifs," *WTJ* 2 (Fall 2007): 305-325.

_____. *That You May Know*, ed. Clendenen, E Ray. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.

Baurain, Thomas "A Short Primer on Hermeneutics," *JODT* 10 (Dec 2006): 41-49.

Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

_____. *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Beale, G. K. with Campbell, David H. *Revelation, A Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*, Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

_____. "John 13-17: The Community of True Life," *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988).

Beeke, Joel R. "Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch 'Nadere Reformatie': From Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640–1760)" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988).

_____. *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

_____. "Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith? Calvin and the Calvinists," *TMSJ* 1 (Spring 1994): 43-71.

_____. "Martin Luther On Assurance" *RAR* 4 (Fall 1998):163-172.

_____. *The Quest for Full Assurance*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999.

Bennett, Bill. "The Greatest Heresy Plaguing Southern Baptists Today," *FM* 17 (Spring 2000): 32-39.

Bernard, J. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 Edinburgh: T&T, 1985.

Bernard, Robert W. "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, edited by Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996).

Beutler, Johannes. *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

Bigalke, Jr. Ron J. "Historical Survey Of Biblical Interpretation," *JODT* 14 (Aug 2010): 35-50.

_____. "Identity Of The First Epistle Of John: Context, Style, And Structure," *JODT* 50 (Spring 2013): 7-44.

Bing, Charles C. "Coming To Terms With Discipleship," *JOTGES* 1 (Spring 1992): 35-49.

Blount, Brian K. *Revelation, A Commentary*, The New Testament Library. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Boice, James Montgomery. *Christ's Call to Discipleship*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Borchert, Gerald L. *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary. Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2002.

_____. *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002.

Boyd, Robert F. "Assurance" in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

Brown, Sherri. "Believing in the Gospel of John: The Ethical Imperative to Becoming Children of God," in *Johannine Ethics, The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*. Eds. Brown, Sherri Brown and Skinner, Christopher W. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017.

Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971.

Burge, Gary M. *John*, The NIV Application Commentary, Gen. Ed. Muck, Terry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Burns, J. Lanier. "John 14:1-27: The Comfort Of God's Presence," *BSAC* 687 (Jul 2015): 299-315.

Burtner, Robert W. and Chiles, Robert E. *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.

Caird, G. B. *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, 8th ed., 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949.

_____. *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. by Pringle, William. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949.

_____. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. McNeil, John T.; trans. Battles, Ford Lewis. 2 Vol.; Library of Christian Classics 20-21. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

Caneday, Ardel B. "Persevering in Christ and Tests of Eternal Life," *SBJT* 3 (Fall 2006): 40-51.

Carson, D. A. "Reflections on Christian Assurance," *WTJ* 1(Spring 1992):1-29.

_____. *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

_____. *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus, An Evangelical Exposition of John 14-17*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018.

_____. in "The SBJT Forum: What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?" *SBJT* 1 (Spring 1998): 64-74.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry "A Voice from the Past: The Terms Of Salvation," *JOTGES* 01 (Autumn 1988):35-57.

Clifford, William K. "The Ethics of Belief", *Contemporary Review* (1877); reprinted in *Clifford's Lectures and Essays*. London: MacMillan, 1879.

Compton, R. Bruce "James 2:21–24 And The Justification Of Abraham," *DBSJ* 02 (Fall 1997): 19-45.

Cook, W. Robert *The Theology of John*. Chicago: Moody, 1979.

Cooper, Kenneth R. "A Survey of the Case for Literal Interpretation of the Scriptures," *JODT* 10 (Sep 2006): 17-33.

Costa, Tony. "The Use Of Πιστεύω In The Gospel Of John: Some Considerations On Meaning And Issues Of Consistency And Ambiguity," *CONSPECTUS* 32:1 (Oct 2021): 93-108.

Crutchfield, Larry V. "The Early Church Fathers and the Foundation of Dispensationalism Part V—Dispensational Concepts in The Polemicists: Irenaeus," *CTJ* 3 (April 1999): 31.

Davie, Martin, Grass, Tim, Holmes, Stephen R., McDowell, John, and Noble, Thomas A., eds. *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2016.

Davis, John Jefferson "The Perseverance Of The Saints: A History Of The Doctrine," *JETS* 2 (Jun 1991):213-228.

Dean, Jr., Robert L. "Abiding In Christ: A Dispensational Theology Of The Spiritual Life (Part 1 Of 3)," *CTSJ* 1 (Jan 2001): 25-51.

Derickson, Gary W. "Viticulture and John 15:1-6." *BSAC* 153:609 (Jan 1996): 34-52.

_____. *1, 2 & 3 John*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Gen. Ed. H. Wayne House. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.

Demarest, B. A. "Assurance," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Demarest, Bruce. *The Cross and Salvation*, General Editor John S. Feinberg. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997.

Deventer, Cornelia van. "Spiritual Birth, Living Water, And New Creation: Mapping Life-Giving Metaphors In The Fourth Gospel," *CONSPECTUS* 32:1 (Oct 2021): 145-146.

Dillow, Joseph C. "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *BSAC* 147 (January 1990): 44-53.

- _____. *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*. Miami, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co. 1992.
- Dodd, C. H. *The Johannine Epistles*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary series. New York: Harper and Row, 1946.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Erickson, Millard J. *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It? The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003.
- Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3. Ed. Balz, Horst and Schneider, Gerhard. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Farstad, Arthur L. "An Introduction To Grace Evangelical Society And Its Journal," *JOTGES* 1 (Autumn 1988): 3-10.
- Fullerton, K. *Prophecy and Authority: A Study in the History of the Doctrine of the Interpretation of Scripture*, 75
- Fee, Gordon D. *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary Series. Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2013.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matter*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2016.
- Ford, David F. *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Garlington, Don. "The "Better Righteousness": Matthew 5:20," *BBR* 20 (NA 2010): 479-502

Geisler, Norman. "A Moderate Calvinist View" in *Four Views on Eternal Security*. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002.

Goldman, Alvin I. Reliabilism, 1998, doi:10.4324/9780415249126-P044-1. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/reliabilism/v-1>.

Goldsworthy, Graeme. "The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid," *SBJT* 12:1 (Spring 2008):4-14.

Gulley, Norman R. *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012.

Gunther, W. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. ed. C. Brown. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981.

Harris, Murray J. *John, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, Gen. Eds. Köstenberger, Andreas J. and Yarbrough, Robert W. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015.

Harrington, Wilfred J. O. P. *Revelation*, in *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Harrington, Daniel J. S. J. Collegedale, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993.

Hawthorne, Gerald F. "The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel," *BSAC*, 118 (Apr 1959): 117-126.

Hendriksen, William John in *New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2004.

Henry Carl F. H. in "The SBJT Forum: What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?" *SBJT* 1 (Spring 1998): 64-74.

Hiebert, D. Edmond. "An Expository Study of 1 John Part 3: An Exposition of 1 John 2:7-17," *BSAC* 580 (Oct 1988): 420-435.

- Hixon, J. B. *The Evangelical Crises No One Is Talking About: Getting the Gospel Wrong*. Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013.
- Hodge, A. A. *Outlines of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949 [1878].
- Hodges, Zane C. "We Believe In Assurance Of Salvation," *JOTGES*, 42 (Spring 2009):11-24.
- Homcy, Stephen L. "To Him Who Overcomes": A Fresh Look At What "Victory" Means For The Believer According To The Book Of Revelation," *JETS* 2 (Jun 1995): 193-201.
- Horne, Thomas Hartwell. *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*. Boston: Littell and Gay, 1868.
- Hoskins, Paul M. "Deliverance From Death By The True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect Of The Fulfillment Of The Passover In The Gospel Of John," *JETS* 2 (Jun 2009): 285-299.
- Howe, Thomas A. "Hermeneutics And Metaphysics," *CAJ* 3 (Fall 2004): 1-9.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *John, That You May Believe*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999.
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, 1748/ 1777 ed., X 'Of Miracles', para. 87: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9662/9662-h/9662-h.htm>. Accessed 11/14/2022.
- Hunn, Debbie. "The Believers Jesus Doubted: John 2:23–25," *TRINJ* 1 (Spring 2004): 15-25.
- Hutcheson, George. *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Puritan Classic Series. Evansville, Indiana: The Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959.
- Jobes, Karen H. *1, 2, & 3 John in Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Gen. Ed. Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Johnson, Thomas F. *1, 2 AND 3 John*, New International Bible Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

Johnson, Jr., S. Lewis. "Trials and Triumphs Through the Triumphant Christ," *EMJ* 1 (Summer 1998): 51-60.

_____. "Abiding in Christ," *EMJ* 2 (Winter 1995): 143-153.

Jones, Peter Rhea. *1, 2 & 3 John*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2009.

Keathley, Kenneth D. "Does Anyone Really Know If They Are Saved? A Survey Of The Current Views On Assurance With A Modest Proposal," *JOTGES* 15 (Spring 2002): 37-59.

Keathley, Kenneth D. "Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010.

_____. *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010.

Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

_____. *The Gospel According to John*, A Commentary, Vol. 1. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.

_____. *The Gospel According to John*, A Commentary, Vol. 2. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.

Kellum, L. Scott. "On the Semantic Structure of 1 John: A Modest Proposal," *FM* 1 (Fall 2005): 34-56.

Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. Oxford: University Press, 1979.

_____. *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 52-53.

Kiddle, Martin. *The Revelation of St. John*, Moffatt NTC. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963.

Kistemaker, Simon J. *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

_____. *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, The New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001.

Klink III, Edward W. *John in Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Gen. Ed. Arnold, Clinton E. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

_____. "Introduction" in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005.

_____. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academy 2018.

Kruse, Colin G. *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

Laney, J. Carl. "Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6," *BSAC* 581 (Jan 1989): 55-66.

Lindars, Barnabas. *The Gospel of John*, The New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961.

Lescelius, Robert. *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers*. Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992.

Lieu, Judith M. *I, II, & III John*, A Commentary. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser. New York: Dover, 1959.

Luther's Works. Ed. Pelikan, Jaroslav. Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann; 55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955.

Lyotard, François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984.

MacArthur, John. "Faith According To The Apostle James," *JETS* 1 (Mar 1990): 13-34.

_____. *John 1-11*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago, IL: Moody, 2006.

_____. *Revelation 1-11* in the MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody, 1999.

_____. *Revelation 12-22* in the MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody, 2000.

McKenzie, J. L. *A Theology of the Old Testament*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974.

MacLeod, David J. "The Love That God Hates," *EMJ* 1 (Summer 1995): 3-20.

Marsh, Cory M. "Jesus As The True Vine: A Transition Of Economies Announced At John 15," *JMAT* 1 (Spring 2019): 103-140.

_____. "Kingdom Hermeneutics and The Apocalypse: A Promotion Of Consistent

Literal Methodology,” *JMAT* 20 (Fall 2016): 84-105.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Epistles of John*, NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

_____. *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*.
Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 1995.

Martin, Francis and Wright IV, William M. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Martin, Robert P. “Christ, The True Vine John 15:1-11” *RBTR* 2 (Jul 2008): 5-42.

McCabe, Robert V. Born Of Water And The Spirit” *DBSJ* 1 (Fall 1999): 85-107.

McCartney, Dan G. *James*, in Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Ed.,
Yarbrough, Robert W. and Stein, Robert H. Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2009.

McHugh, John F. *John 1-4 A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, in International Critical
Commentary. Eds. Davies G. I. and. Tuckett C. M. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009.

McHugh, John F. and Stanton, Graham. *John 1-4 (ICC): A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*.
New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014.

McQuilkin, Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 2d ed. Chicago: Moody Press,
1 992.

McWilliams, David B. "Calvin's Theology of Certainty" in Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey G.
Waddington, ed. *Resurrection and Eschatology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.

Metzger, Paul Louis. *The Gospel of John*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Michaels, J Ramsey. *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New
Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Moloney, Francis J. *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press,

1998.

Morris, Leon. "Faith," in *New Bible Dictionary*. ed. J. D. Douglas; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

_____. *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987.

_____. "Faith" in *New Bible Dictionary*. Organizing Editor, Douglas, J. D. Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1962.

Motyer, J. Alec. *Isaiah*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Müller, D. "Disciple" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1. Edit. Brown, Collin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

Murray, John. *Collected Writings of John Murray*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977.

Muse, Robert L. "Revelation 2—3: A Critical Analysis Of Seven Prophetic Messages," *JETS* 29 (Jun 1986): 147-161.

Myers, Jeremy D. "Good Works: A Necessary Result of Justification?" *CTSJ* 10 (Spring 2004): 2-10.

Niemelä, John "Free At Last! Freedom In Jesus' Footsteps (John 8:30–32)" *JOTGES* 31(Autumn 2018): 57-71.

New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, Vol. 3. Revised Editor Silva, Moisés. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 1. Ed. Brown, Collin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel*. Grand Rapids:

- Eerdmans, 1982.
- Noble, Paul R. *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*. New York: Brill, 2005.
- Noll, Mark. "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," *BSAC* 132 (1975):161- 77.
- Novakovic, Lidija. *John 1-10 A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020.
- Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John: Books 1–10: Books 13–32*. trans. Ronald E. Heine; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989.
- _____. *Origen De Principiis*, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. 1886; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- Osborne, Grant T. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Edition Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Painter, John. *1, 2, AND 3 John*, Sacra Pagina. Ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002.
- Parsenius, George L. *First, Second, and Third John* in Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Pate, C. Marvin. *The Writings of John, A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Pförtner, Stephan H. *Luther and Aquinas, a Conversation: Our Salvation, Its Certainty and Peril*, trans. Edward Quinn. London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964.
- Phillips, Richard D. *John Vol.1: Chapters 1-10*, Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014.

Pierson, Arthur T. *The Heart of the Gospel: Sermons on the Life-Changing Power of the Good News*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Plummer, Alfred. *The Epistles of St. John*. Cambridge: University Press, 1890.

Rainbow, Paul A. *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

_____. *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005.

Ramm, Bernard *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970.

Rensberger, David. *1 John 2 John 3 John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Rogers, Eugene F. 'Good Works and Assurance of Salvation in Three Traditions: *Fides Praevisa*, the Practical Syllogism, and Merit, *SJT* 50 (1997): 131-56.

Rohr, John von. "The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought," *American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion*, vol. 45. Eds. Hardwick, Charley and Duke, James O. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.

Rokser, Dennis M. "Can You Know for Sure You Are Saved Forever?" in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology*. Eds. Hixson, J. B. Whitmire, Rick and Zuck, Roy B. Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012.

Roloff, Jürgen. *The Revelation of John*, A Continental Commentary, Trans. John E. Alsup. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Rosscup, James E. "Fruit in the New Testament," *BSAC*, 125 (Jan 1968): 56-66.

_____. "The Overcomer of the Apocalypse," *GTJ*, 03 (Fall 1982): 261-286.

Ryle, J. C. *Expository Thought on the Gospels: John*, 3 Vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999.

_____. *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1856

Sailhamer, John H. "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History In Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 44 (Jun 2001):193-206.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 1. New York: Crossroad, 1980.

_____. *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 2. New York: Crossroad, 1980.

_____. *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol 3. New York: Crossroad, 1975.

_____. "Christian Morality According to John," in *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology (John's Gospel and Epistles)*. Ed. Taylor, Michael J. New York: Alba House, 1970.

Schreiner, Thomas R. & Caneday, Ardel B. *The Race Set Before Us, A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001.

Scobie, Charles H. H. "The Challenge Of Biblical Theology" *TYNBUL* 42:1 (NA 1991): 31-61.

Searles, Matt. "These Things I Have Said To You": An Investigation Of How Purpose Clauses Govern The Interpretation Of John 14–16," *JETS* 3 (Sep 2017): 511-524.

Seymour, Richard A. "Examining Difficult Passages Concerning Eternal Security" *CTSJ* 14 (Spring 2009): 32-64.

Smalley, Stephen S. *1, 2, and 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

- Smith, Charles R. "The Unfruitful Branches in John 15," *GJ* 09:2 (Spring 1968): 3-20.
- Smith Jr., D. Moody. *John* in Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Smith, D. Moody. *First Second, And Third John*, Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.
- Stanglin, Keith D. *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation, The Context, Root, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609*. Boston: Brill, 2007.
- Stegall, Thomas L. "Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ," in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology* eds. J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire and Roy B. Zuck (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), 435.
- Stefanovic, Ranko. *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002.
- Stein, Robert H. Stein, "Saved by Faith [Alone]" in Paul Versus "Not Saved by Faith Alone" in James," *SBTJ* 3 (Fall 2000): 4-17.
- Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. 3rd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- Stendahl, K. 'Biblical Theology, Contemporary', *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. New York, Abingdon 1962.
- Stevick, Daniel. *Jesus and His Own: A Commentary on John 13-17*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Stoeffler, F. Ernest. "The Wesleyan Concept of Religious Certainty—Its Pre-history and Significance," *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, series 6, 33 (April 1964), 132.
- Storms, Samuel C "Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

Story, J. Lyle. "The New Relationship of Mutual Indwelling (John 15.1–17)," *JPT* 26 (2017): 153-177.

Stott, John R. W. *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Stovell, Beth M. "The Birthing Spirit, The Childbearing God: Metaphors Of Motherhood And Their Place In Christian Discipleship," *PP* 4 (Autumn 2012): 16-19.

Tan, Paul Lee. *Literal Interpretation of the Bible* (1967; reprint, Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1978.

Tappert, Theodore G. ed. and trans., *Luther's Works*, gen. ed. Lehmann, Helmut T. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.

Tasker, R. V. G. *The Gospel According to St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

_____. *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Terry, Milton S. *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*. 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974.

The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translations. St. Louis: Herder, 1955.

Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago: Moody, 1992.

Thompson, Leonard L. *Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Thompson, Marianne Meye. *John: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.

Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004.

Tucker, John A. "The Inevitability Of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis Of John 15:6 – Part II," *JODT* 45 (Aug 2011): 49-68.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

_____. "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics" in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 95.

Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. II. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.

Virkler, Henry A. *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981.

Wahlde, Urban C. von. *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 3. Eerdmans Critical Commentary Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Wallis, J. "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience," *Sojourners* (March 1976): 21.

Walvoord, John F. "The Kingdom of Heaven," *BSAC* 495 (Jul 1967): 200.

Weinrich, William C. *John 1:1-7:1*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015.

Wellum, Stephen J. "Reflecting on the Kingdom of God," *SBJT* 1 (Spring 2008): 2-3.

Westcott, B. F. *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1950), 307.

Westcott, Brooke Foss and Westcott, Arthur. *The Gospel according to St. John*. Grand Rapids:

Baker, 1980.

Wilkin, Robert N “A Review of Matthew C. Hoskinson’s “Assurance of Salvation: Implications Of A New Testament Theology Of Hope” *JOTGES* 32 (Autumn 2019): 19-33.

_____. “Benefits Of Christ’s Blood: Restricted And Unrestricted?” *JOTGES* 43 (Autumn 2009): 3-10.

_____. “Repentance and Salvation Part 1: The Doctrine of Repentance in Church History,” *JOTGES* 01 (Autumn 1988): 11-20.

_____. "The Practical Syllogism and Assurance," *JOTGES* 31 (Autumn 2018): 19-33.

Wong, Daniel K. K. “The Hidden Manna and the White Stone in Revelation 2:17,” *BSAC* 155 (Jul 1998): 346-354.

_____ K. “The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21,” *BSAC* 156 (Jul 1999): 297-307.

Wuest, Kenneth S. “Prepositions and Synonyms in Greek Exposition Part III,” *BSAC* 467 (Jul 1960): 234-241.

Yarbrough, Robert W. *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Yarid, Jr. John R. “Reflections of the Upper Room Discourse in 1 John,” *BSAC* 637 (Jan 2003): 65-78.

Yates, Arthur S. *The Doctrine of Assurance with Special Reference to John Wesley*. London: Epworth, 1952.

Yates, Richard Shalom “The Function of the Tribulation Saints,” *BSAC* 163 (Apr 2006): 215-233.

