

Some Gleanings

by Bill Crews

John 3:36 reads: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” This is the wording of the **King James Version**; the **New King James Version** reads about the same. But the **American Standard Version** reads: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that **obeyeth not** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” This is not only a more accurate rendering of the Greek text, but it also shows 1) the necessity of obedience as well as faith, 2) the fact that believing on the Son includes obedience to the Son, and 3) the fallacy of the doctrine of salvation by “faith only.” That the **American Standard Version** is correct in this passage is supported by this quotation from the scholar, Marvin R. Vincent: “More correctly, as the Revised, ‘obeyeth not.’ Disbelief is regarded in its active manifestation, disobedience. The verb ΠΙΘΗ means to ‘persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading,’ and so runs into the meaning of ‘to obey,’ properly as the result of persuasion. See on Acts 5:29. Compare 1 Peter 4:17; Romans 2:8; 11:30-31. Obedience, however, includes faith. Compare Romans 1:5, ‘the obedience of faith.’” [*Word Studies In The New Testament, Volume 2, page 109*]. We need to observe also that “believeth” and “obeyeth not” in John 3:36 are from two different Greek verbs. The faith that God requires includes obedience, and the obedience that God accepts springs from faith. The New Testament nowhere says that we are saved by “faith alone.” It does, however deny that we are saved by faith alone in James 2:24.

The New Testament books were written originally in the Koine Greek language, the common language of the Roman empire in the first century. In the Koine Greek, *verb tense* describes primarily the **kind of action** rather than the **time of action**. (In our English language the *tense of a verb* denotes **the time of action** more than anything else.) In the Koine Greek *present tense* is used to describe *action that continues* (called “linear” or “durative” action). Aorist, another *tense* in the Koine Greek, is used to describe *point action* (called “punctiliar action”). With this in mind, let us quote some examples from a Koine Greek textbook: “On the question of the believer’s relation to sin, it is exceedingly important to observe John’s use of the present and aorist tenses in his first epistle. In 1 John 2:1, he uses the aorist tense twice with the verb **HARMARTANEIN**, ‘to sin,’ ‘My little children, I write these things to you **HINA ME HAMARTETE**, in order that you won’t even commit an act of sin. And **EAN TIS HARMARTE**, if anyone does commit a sin, we have an advocate with the Father.’ In 3:9 he uses the present tense with the same verb: ‘Everyone born of God **OU POIEI**, does not practice or continue in sin; because his seed **MENEI**, is abiding in him, and he is not able to **HAMARTANEIN**, continue in sin, because he **GEGENETAI**, has been born of God.’ Thus the use of tense may often, when clearly understood, illuminate passages which in the translations seem difficult.” [*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, by Dana & Mantey, page 195*]. 1 John is often misused by some to teach that a Christian **cannot** (is unable to) **commit a sin** (thus, sinless perfection) and by others to teach that a child of God cannot so sin as to be lost (thus, the impossibility of apostasy). Neither 1 John nor any other New Testament book supports these erroneous doctrines. The *New American Standard Bible* does a better job than most translations to bring out the true meaning of Greek tenses.

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