

## TRUST AND OBEY

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A remarkable statement, written by the apostle John, is found in John 3:36. The Scripture says, “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.” The linguistic and grammatical features of this text are significant. These features focus on three contrasts.

First, two present participles are set in contrast to each other. The word “believeth” is translated from *pisteuōn*. *Pisteuōn* is a present participle and indicates a continuing attitude of active faith. John uses the verb *pisteuō* 98 times. He never uses the noun *pistis* (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 87). In the Gospel of John, faith is something that involves activity. It is something people do. Morris mentions that John’s favorite construction is to follow the verb with *eis* and the accusative case (found 36 times in John’s Gospel). W. Turner writes, “The sense must be that the believer throws himself upon his Lord in loving, self-abandoning faith and trust” (quoted by Morris, 87). If one believes God, one acts upon that faith. Hence, we have an “obedient faith” or an “active faith.” John’s concept of faith is never mere mental ascent. Faith necessarily manifests itself in action.

This is made more forceful whenever we consider that the positive statement is followed by the negative. We might expect “whoever does not believe” as in v. 18 with the use of *pisteuōn*. However, John uses *apeithōn* (only here in John’s writings) instead. This word is also a present participle denoting continuous action. It is translated “believeth not” in the KJV. But, the ASV translates the word “obeyeth not.” *Apeitheō* is the negation of the Greek word *peithō* (to be persuaded, to trust in, to obey). *Apeitheō* means “to refuse to be persuaded, to refuse

belief, to be disobedient (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, I, 319-320). *Apeithōn* means to continue to refuse to do the Will of God. This reflects an attitude of heart that manifests itself in action. The attitude is unbelief and the action is disobedience or noncompliance. Those who believe the Son obey Him and those who do not believe the Son disobey Him.

Second, there is a contrast between “a son” and “the Son.” The word Son is translated from the Greek word *huios*. *Huios* is used by John in the absolute sense, “the Son.” *Huios* is never used by John of anyone other than Jesus Christ. John never uses *huios* when he speaks of people as sons of God. Morris states, “He reserves this word for Jesus and the terminology points to his view that the nature of Jesus’ sonship is different from ours” (Morris, 219).

Obedient, active faith is directed to “the Son.” We must believe/obey the commands that Jesus Christ has issued. This necessitates recognition of His Lordship. It also necessitates recognition of His deity. The relationship between the Father and the Son is one of equality (Phil. 2:5-11) and consequently confirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

Third, note the contrast between “hath everlasting life” and “the wrath of God abideth on him.” There are two starkly different results from *believing on Jesus* and *disobeying Jesus*. Those who believe on the Son have everlasting life. The word “hath” (Greek word *echei*, third person singular of the present indicative of *echoo*) is present tense. This is an example of the futuristic present. The *futuristic present*, “denotes an event which has not yet occurred but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be contemplated as already coming to pass” (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 185). How does a child of God possess eternal life? The answer is that he possesses it in promise. John writes, “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (I John 2:25). If a child of God possessed

eternal life now, then he could never be lost. That which is eternal is unending. The Scriptures teach that the child of God can be lost (II Peter 2:20-22). The promise of eternal life belongs to those who actively embrace the teachings of Jesus Christ and obey them.

In contrast to this, the wrath of God abides upon those who are disobedient. The Greek word for wrath, *orgē*, is used by John only in this verse (in the book of John). The wrath of God describes the general relation in which man as a sinner stands toward the justice of God (B. F. Westcott, *Gospel of John*, 63). The wrath of God is God's strong displeasure with sin and sinners. The wrath of God stems from the holiness of God. God is infinite in holiness and is separate from all sin. God's wrath is His strong repulsion against sin and sinners. God's wrath is His justice executing righteous judgment against sin. This is righteous anger—the right reaction of moral perfection (holiness) in the Creator toward the moral perversity in the creature (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 184). We should not be amazed that God would punish the evil doer. We should be astonished if He didn't!

John 3:36 teaches the necessity of trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith only is not sufficient to save. Faith must actively respond in obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. A positive response to the commands of Jesus results in a new spiritual life and the promise of eternal life. A negative response of noncompliance to His commands places one under the wrath of God.