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## *...That You May Believe*

### Formulating a Theology of *Pisteuo* (believe) in John's Narrative

Ryan Habbena

Few biblical authors give their readers such a clear proclamation of “intent” as does the author of the gospel of John. In bold and simple fashion, John announces his purpose in penning his account of the person and work of Jesus Christ. On the heels of his chronicling of the teaching of Jesus, the signs that pointed to His authenticity, and the glory of His death and resurrection, John exclaims: “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31) The purpose is for the reader *to believe*. The fruit of belief is *life in His Name*.

The term that John uses in this text, as well as predominately through the narrative, is *pisteuo*. In this work, I intend to wrestle with the complexity resulting from the various manners, and various contexts, in which John uses the term *pisteuo*. While the purpose statement of 20:30-31 is still central and presupposes the exhorted belief to be genuine, expanded possibilities arise when considering John's overall usage of this word and precisely how this usage could function within the initial Johannine readership, as well as the extended implied audience.

#### Sketching the Complexity of John's Usage of *pisteuo*

The verb *pisteuo* is used no less than 98 times in the Gospel of John. The noun form of the word, (*pistis*) is totally absent, lending credence to the assertion that John is focusing on the active nature of faith.<sup>1</sup> The gospel of John contains well over half of the instances of the verb form of this word found in the New Testament. Coupled with the purpose statement noted above, it is plainly evident this is a primary theme in the Gospel. Beyond this fact there are terms that are theologically related to “believe”: come to (e.g. John 6:44), receive (e.g. John 5:43-44), and abide (e.g. John 15:4), are a sampling of these.

While the necessity of belief is paramount in John's gospel, we must be careful not to oversimplify the issue. In the wake of the watershed event of the Reformation, Protestant (as well as Catholic) thinkers focused much of their identity around the nature of *faith*. With so much attention paid to “*faith*” in biblical scholarship over the last several centuries, we may be tempted to simply infuse our theological presuppositions into this term in a uniform manner across biblical contexts. While such a method may not create conflict in other certain New

Testament texts, John's usage of the term *pisteuo* will not lend itself to such.

John's usage of the term *pisteuo* is complex. In the vast majority of instances, John's usage of *pisteuo* presupposes an authentic, active, abiding belief in Jesus of Nazareth. However, there are other instances when *pisteuo* is used in a superficial, transitory manner. The following passages highlight this tension and demonstrate the complexity of John's usage of this central term in his narrative:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes (*pisteuon*) in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

This passage is central to John's function of belief and declares the one that responds in faith to the "light that has come into the world" has "eternal life." Unbelief will result in judgment. Yet, the narrative also gives examples of those who "believe" but yet do not possess this "life." Note the following exchange that follows Jesus' teaching on His obedience to the Father:

As He spoke these things, many came to believe (*episteuosan*) in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you." (John 8:30-37)

What is readily apparent from this account is many came "to believe" but, when confronted with the further claims of Christ, are revealed to be "children of the devil" (8:44) who are not "truly disciples" (8:31) and thus have no "life."<sup>2</sup> This is not the first instance of such; many disciples left Jesus in chapter 6 (vs. 66), John strongly implies transitory faith in 2:23-25, and the parable of the vine and branches (15:1-11) is a strong warning against transitory faith.

John's purpose is that the reader<sup>3</sup> will believe. In light of the conflict that plagued the initial readership<sup>4</sup> calls to persevering belief in Jesus were necessary. Continuing in His word and work was necessary. The narrative is persistent in asserting belief as the only approved response to person and claims of Christ. Yet, the above sampling reflects a repeated theme in John. Many "disciples" *do not* continue with Jesus. Many who "believe" (*pisteuo*) eventually reject Jesus and are not "truly disciples." What are we to make of this tension in reference to John's initial readers and the extended implied audience?

## The Spectrum of Scholarly Interaction with the Tension

The thematic element of "belief" is prominently displayed throughout the narrative of the Gospel of John, and as a result of this most works note its presence and assess its function. While there is a vast array of interactions with the "theology of belief" in the Gospel of John, the following is well representative of this scholarly spectrum and how the tension sketched above is addressed.

In the introduction to his work *John: The Gospel of Belief*, Merrill C. Tenney examines the purpose statement of 20:30-31 as the guiding motif for understanding the gospel itself. In the midst of this he interacts with John's usage of *pisteuo*. He writes: "The underlying Greek word, *pisteuo*, is used no less than 100 times in the Gospel and is customarily translated believe, though in a few instances it is rendered trust or commit. Never does it mean mere assent to a preposition. It usually means acknowledgement of some personal claim or even a complete personal commitment to some ideal or person."<sup>5</sup> While this is a fair definition of the usage of *pisteuo* in John, in this portion of the text, as well as throughout his textual analysis, Tenney neglects to interact with the instances where faith is transitory. Little-to-no attention is paid to the motif of transitory faith. As a result of this, no commentary is given on how this varied usage may function in John's narrative.<sup>6</sup>

While Tenney is lacking in this realm, Craig Keener recognizes this dynamic in John's narrative and gives it a fairly extensive treatment in the introduction to his two-volume work of the gospel of John. Keener interacts with the issue of transitory faith in his discussion on the relationship between faith and signs. He outlines the reactions to signs throughout the gospel and notes the "faith" that results from these. Some are faithless while others have faith as the result of the signs. But as he notes, these are not in and of themselves adequate responses in the gospel. "Faith as a result of signs is not bad," notes Keener. "but it must proceed to discipleship . . . and by itself is inadequate."<sup>7</sup> He moves on to describe the nature and content of "saving faith" as a "persevering faith."<sup>8</sup>

In his work *Reading John's Gospel Today*, John Painter recognizes the tension of "faith responses" and proceeds to not only explore this dynamic in the narrative but also postulates as to the function of this varied usage. Painter devotes several pages to sketching the tension and issues of faith in John's narrative, including a discussion of "superficial faith" versus "authentic faith." In discussing "superficial faith," Painter notes that, "misunderstanding marks this faith. The misunderstandings are characteristics of the Jewish situation, especially the category of a political Messiah, with the scandal of his self-testimony. Thus, the existence of the misunderstanding reminds us of the historical perspective, and it is used by John as a motif to clarify the understanding of the person of Christ to the reader."<sup>9</sup>

The above three examples well represent the varied scholarly interaction with the tension of "belief" in John's narrative. The interaction ranges from minimal discussion to an extended examination of the tension and exploration of how this usage may function in the gospel. Yet, before we wrestle with this tension and its possible function within the narrative, the benefits and limitations of word studies, especially with the present term, is profitable to outline in light of the noted difficulties.

## The Benefits and Limitations of Word Studies

It is well established that "word studies" are a profitable discipline in biblical studies. In fact, interacting with the Greek (or Hebrew) is often indispensable for ascertaining thematic material and stressed elements of the text. With this established, there are many pitfalls in the realm of word studies that will hinder rather than help biblical interpretation. One in particular that is pertinent to subject at hand is false assumptions about technical meaning. In his work, *Exegetical Fallacies*, D.A. Carson notes this error: "In this fallacy, an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always, or nearly always, has a certain technical meaning – a meaning usually derived from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter's systematic theology."<sup>10</sup> Carson goes on to give several instances such as "sanctification" and "baptism." It is clear that John's usage of *pisteuo* carries this potential. If one assumes *pisteuo* in John always denotes divinely approved faith that thereby *de facto* results in eternal life, certain passages are wrought with nearly impossible interpretive difficulties and the entire narrative thrust is derailed.

Usage and context reveal meaning and function.<sup>11</sup> With this said, word studies are only able to take us so far and infusing presuppositional theological elements<sup>11</sup> into this term may prove preventative in considering possible overarching purposes and functions of John's complex usage of *pisteuo*. In light of these things, I believe it profitable to recognize that *pisteuo* in John is used predominately in a positive, approved sense yet also

stressing throughout the gospel that “belief” is possible to be inauthentic and transitory. Ultimately, the immediate context of the term will define the implied nature of the faith described. Examining the broad and various usage of the term in each respective context will help one sketch a collective theology of *pisteuo* in John’s narrative. With these caveats established, let us proceed to explore a framework of understanding John’s usage of *pisteuo* and its possible function.

## Formulating a Theology of “Belief” in John’s Narrative

The fact that John uses *pisteuo* in both an authentic and transitory manner holds a possibility for uncovering an underlying intent and function of the Gospel. As mentioned above, word studies primarily highlight the amount and varied usage of the term within the narrative. When collectively assessing the usage of *pisteuo*, John uses it predominately as a call to place belief and trust in Jesus Christ despite external and internal pressures to reject. The fact that many believe and subsequently *do not* continue serves as an implicit, yet powerful, warning. As the implied reader progresses through the gospel and encounters those who believe but are not approved by Jesus, an underlying question the implied reader may (and should) ask arises: “Is it I, Lord?” Answering this question comes from an extended examination of not only the immediate contexts of John’s usage of *pisteuo* but also the equivalent terms and themes that arise throughout the entirety of the gospel. With this as the formulating framework, in the following I will sketch elements of what John defines as divinely approved faith and that which is transitory belief.

## What are the Characteristics of a Divinely Approved Faith?

To ascertain the characteristics of divinely approved faith, we must read John with a collective view in mind and a careful eye. We are to pay attention to the positive affirmations of responses, to the didactic instructions regarding how divinely approved faith acts, and to rebukes to those who lacked such qualities. Below is a survey, albeit not exhaustive, of the characteristics that constitutes authentic, divinely approved faith in John’s narrative.

### *Authentic Faith Continues in His Word*

Jesus gives the declaration of continuing in His word while revealing the transitory faith of certain “believers” in chapter 8: “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (vs. 31). Discipleship is stressed again in the farewell discourse, Jesus challenges the reader: “If anyone loves me he will keep my word” (14:23). Authentic faith continues in the words of Christ even when they clash with certain assumptions or expectations.

### *Authentic Faith Abides in Him*

The primary call to abide in Christ occurs in the parable of the vine and branches in John’s narrative. In the central call of the farewell discourse, Jesus explains to His disciples: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not

abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned”(John 15:5-6). This picture is echoed through the narrative in various places. Those who abide, continue, and remain with Jesus are the ones who “bear fruit” and possess the abundance of life in the invading era of Messianic salvation. Those who do not abide will be “cut off” and subject to judgment.

### ***Authentic Faith Trusts***

In the midst of the signs that John records, the narrative highlights positive affirmations from those who trust in Him despite oppression, doubt, and even death itself. The man, blind from birth, who is illumed to both the light of day and the light of Christ was oppressed by the Temple establishment yet proclaimed His trust: “Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him” (9:37-38).

Martha, though her brother had died, announced her trust, which the reader is called to emulate: “Martha then said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You’” (11:21). When Thomas was confronted with the living Christ, the ultimate sign, Jesus exhorts just prior to the purpose statement: “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” (20:27). Active trust in the person, words, and works of Jesus Christ are markers of an authentic faith in the Gospel of John.

### ***Authentic Faith Loves and Obeys***

In John, love and obedience are two sides of the same coin and are part-and-parcel to an authentic faith. In the farewell discourse, faith in Jesus is to produce love. Love is to produce obedience. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love must also be part of the discipleship community. It is a divine seal of being a disciple of Christ: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Even in the wake of grievous denial, love is both affirmed and expressed (21:15-17).

### ***Authentic Faith and its Worship are Fixed upon Jesus***

Faith and worship are fixed on Jesus Christ. This is established and confirmed in various manners throughout the Gospel. The “feast proclamations,” the “I am” statements, as well as “the Passover” of Jesus death and resurrection reconstitute faithful worship of God around Him. The prologue of the Gospel (1:1-18), as well as Thomas’ confession (“My Lord and my God” 20:28), are suitable bookends to a gospel that centers devotion of faith and discipleship upon the person of Jesus.

### **What are the Characteristics of a Transitory Faith?**

It is safe to assert that transitory or inauthentic faith lacks the above qualities. In other words, inauthentic belief is defined by those who place their faith in Jesus for reasons other than genuine trust and association with Him

on His terms. Transitory faith is defined by a reserved association with Christ. As a result, when these underlying reasons for their belief are challenged and undermined by Jesus' teaching, they do not continue. However, beyond simply noting transitory faith is the inverse of authentic faith, it is profitable to note the specific aspects that caused those who had "believed" to be offended and, thus, cease to follow in John's narrative.

The two stark accounts of the failure of transitory faith are in chapter six and chapter eight. In chapter six a primary source of offense was that Jesus taught, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (6:56). In the wake of this teaching we are informed, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (6:66). Whatever we may make of the Eucharistic implications of this text,<sup>12</sup> I think it is clear that, at a cursory level, this text affirms to the reader the need for disciples to continue in the reality of a crucified Messiah; this being central to abiding in Christ.

In chapter eight we read of those that *embody* transitory faith. In mere moments within the progression of the narrative they move from faith in Jesus (8:30) to blasphemous unbelief and a desire to kill the Messiah (8:48, 52, 59). The following exchange served as the source of offense to these temporary converts:

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. (John 8:31-34)

At issue was the identity of the children of Abraham and the issue of "slavery to sin." The underlying issue was the need for all, both Jew and Gentile alike, to continue in Jesus' word to be free from this slavery; to be a part of the new Exodus and the perfect Passover Lamb. The ones who do not align with Jesus have neither "Abraham" nor "God" as their father.<sup>13</sup> While this may have been seen as a threat to the identity of the Jewish nation, the extended mission of the Messiah (for the world, including Israel) is primary in John (e.g. 3:16, 4:42, 10:16 12:20, 32) and must be maintained by the discipleship community in the midst of conflict.

With these two above issues highlighted by John as areas of noted offense, and with these being primary overarching issues that defined the conflict between the Christian and the established Judaic belief, these accounts may well have served as warnings to the implied reader to continue in the message of the cross and the message of universal sin and salvation,<sup>14</sup> both being essential to the faith of the Johannine readership.

### ***Security in the Midst of Warning***

While warnings will serve their purpose to fortify faith, so will elements of assurance, and John is not lacking in such. While the narrative is marked with explicit and implied calls to costly discipleship and continuing faith, there is also soothing assurance given to the readers who are "truly" disciples. The promise of eternal life (John 3:16-17), the assurance of a protecting Shepherd (10:27-30), the comfort in the farewell discourse (esp. 16:32:33), and the prayer of the Lord Himself (chapter 17), grant pastoral assurance to those who are "truly disciples" that "abide in Him." Their standing is not of themselves, but is a result of the saving purposes of the Father and the Son (10:29-30). In accordance with the explicit pastoral concern in 1 John 2:19,<sup>15</sup> those who do not continue are always portrayed as never truly being "of us" (e.g. John 2:23-24, 6:64). Therefore, the narrative of John is beautifully balanced with necessary challenges of continued faith and confirmations of security, both serving to bolster the faith of disciples in difficult circumstances.

## The Purpose Statement (*John 20:30-31*) Revisited

As mentioned in the introduction, John gives a pointed proclamation of his purpose in 20:30-31:

Therefore many other *signs* Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but *these have been written* so that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have *life* in *His name*.” (John 20:30-31 *emphasis added*)

Given what has been asserted thus far in this work, revisiting this purpose statement with the “faith tension” in mind may illuminate this passage in ways not seen before.

The signs of Jesus were written in the book of John to point to the Messiah and the reality of His Kingship. They point to the person and work of Christ, but “seeing” these signs are by no means a necessary means for belief. On the contrary, Jesus announces a blessing for those who have not seen and yet believe (20:29). Nevertheless, these were written in order for the reader *to believe*. Is this a statement of an *evangelistic purpose* or does it center upon *discipleship*?

With what has been noted above, I believe the immediate reader for John’s narrative is “current believers.” The purpose is to *continue* believing.<sup>16</sup> Through the declaration of signs, the implicit warnings of transitory faith, the need for perseverance, and comforting interludes of assurance, the book of John is a beautiful exhortation to believe, to trust in Christ regardless of circumstances. Through reading and heeding, the disciple’s faith is both edified and fortified. However, this does not negate a possible function of evangelism. While I believe the “current disciple” is the immediate intended reader, an evangelistic function is well viewed as an underlying aspect of the narrative.<sup>17</sup>

With this being the intended purpose of the Gospel, John also tells of the result of responding to the message in authentic belief – *life*. Those who believe, and only those who believe, possess (as a gift) the life that is inherent in Messianic salvation. Life in the Son is a robust qualitative position of being included in the salvific purpose of God in Christ. This includes restored relationship(s), freedom from sin, peace, and ultimately glorification. And this life, which is both “now and forever,” is *in his name*. This concluding portion of the purpose statement is extremely pertinent to what has been discussed thus far. *Life* is rooted in the identity of Jesus Christ. If one rejects “His name” they have no life in themselves. The name of the Son of God consists of the necessary revealed elements that define Him. John has carefully constructed these throughout his gospel of Jesus: His divine identity, His human identity, His fulfillment of Messianic expectation, His salvific purpose for the world, and His death and resurrection. These are necessary aspects of Christ’s name, because of which many have, and will, fall away. This is highlighted and takes on added significance when viewed against the backdrop of genuine and transitory faith. Those who have life, have so because they are “*in His name*.”

## Conclusion

The word *pisteuo* must be taken in the broad context of the gospel itself and in accordance with John’s usage. Attempts to import certain technical theological elements into this word will result in great difficulties if applied in every instance. The fact that *pisteuo* is found to be transitory in certain contexts provides the implied audience with the implicit challenge and explicit need to continue in Christ if they are to be numbered among the faithful worshippers of God.

Those who *believe* in a divinely approved manner will abide in Christ, will center their faith upon Him, will continue in His word, and will walk in love. Those who continue in faith despite the temptation and persecution to abandon the Son of God have “life” both in the present and extending into eternity. Their faith and position is not of themselves but is originated and sustained by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although there are stern explicit and implicit warnings to continue in Christ, the narrative is filled with great assurance for those that “listen to His voice” (10:4). Continued exploration into the specific areas of conflict that plagued the Johannine readership will further develop the specifics of this function of John’s usage of *pisteuo*.

Signs are intended to point the reader to Christ, and are to fortify one’s faith. These serve to strengthen the reader’s commitment and bolster endurance in the midst of persecution and testing. With this noted, there is encouragement for those outside the narrative who hear the testimony of Christ and believe without the “seeing” of signs. Their faith is rendered blessed by the Lord Himself.

Since the issue of *believing* is so central to the purpose of John’s narrative, no overall treatment of the function of his gospel is complete without wrestling with the above tensions. Far from creating theological confusion, the fact that the author does not use the thematic term *pisteuo* in a theologically uniform manner opens up possibilities of implicit yet radical challenges of discipleship in the “big picture” of John’s narrative. This reality confronts the reader with the high calling of receiving the Son and the entirety of His message. Authentic belief will continue in Him and His word; bearing fruit despite all attempts to the contrary. Such an assertion was essential in the Johannine community and remains a powerful exhortation to the church and much needed admonition to the strands of “cheap grace” and “easy believism” that permeate our contemporary Christian culture.

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## End Notes

1. The tally of *pisteuo* in John is from John Painter's, *Reading John's Gospel Today*, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 77. He also wrestles with the absence of the verb form. While active, continuing faith is a continuing theme this does not entail that content is secondary. Both are interdependent as will be demonstrated below.
2. Kostenberger affirms and concludes: "Quite apparently the faith of these 'believers' is shallow." and "The measure of any disciples is the ability to hold to the master's teaching (c.f. 2 John 9)." Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the N. T.: John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 260-261.
3. Much of the scholarly construction of the "Johannine community" has been historically focused on the Hellenistic and Gnostic overtones of the Gospel. However, much of recent scholarship has argued convincingly regarding the "Jewishness" of John's gospel. For instance, Martyn concludes that "the history of the Johannine community from its origin through the period of its life in the which the Fourth Gospel was composed forms to no small extent a chapter in the history of *Jewish Christianity*."
4. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology of the Fourth Gospel*, (Louisville: John Knox, 2003) 167.
5. Whitacre has compelling arguments for a "three way conflict" that forms the proto-rabbinical Judaism, proto-Gnosticism, and the faithful community. He postulates that: "John is defending his understanding of Jesus over and against both establishment and non-establishment forms within Judaism. In doing so the formation of a distinctive Christian identity is further developed." Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999) 32.
6. Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 32.
7. In his assessment on the conflict in chapter 8, Tenney only mentions the "belief" in passing and comments that "Probably the belief of the Jews was shallow and Jesus knew it. He was attempting to deepen it, but his instruction encountered resistance" (ibid, 146). While the belief was indeed shallow, the tone of the discourse seems to argue against viewing this as an attempt to "deepen their faith" but more rather more compellingly served to reveal the transitory nature of such.
8. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume I*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003) 277.
9. Ibid.
10. See Painter, 82.
11. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 45.
12. This does not entail that certain theological elements of faith as declared in other N.T. texts are necessarily absent in John. Nor does it mean that viewing John's usage of *pisteuo* as distinct from, say, Paul, undermines the consistency of the Scriptures. It simply stresses the point that authorial usage and context must be the examined prior to systematic consideration.
13. David Gibson, "EATING IS BELIEVING? ON MIDRASH AND THE MIXING OF METAPHORS IN JOHN 6." *Themelios* 27.7 (Spring 2002) 5-15. and James F. McGrath, "FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE (JOHN 6:25-71) IN JOHANNINE LEGITIMATION." *Theological Gathering 2* (Winter 1997). Both note there may be implications for the Eucharist, but John's specific intent is metaphorical of reception of Jesus' death (the "Manna" motif is especially stressed in McGrath's work).
14. Ridderbos notes that "Jesus description of his adversaries as children of an alien father would be to their minds the most offensive accusation he could advance against them" Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1997) 313. It is also profitable to note that most of the time "children of" carries the meaning of "characterized by" in this context, not necessarily physical descent.
15. The offense of such teaching was two-fold: First, it would have been perceived as undermining the primary place of ethnic Israel. Secondly, it would have elevated the status of Gentiles. The first coming of the Messiah inverted earthly expectations in fulfilling the "Abrahamic promise" which was central in the dispute in chapter 8.
16. "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19).
17. Wallace wrestles with the purpose statement and its function, including a textual issue: "One question remains, however: the main verb, "believe" has a textual glitch. It is either *pisteuvshite* (aorist) or *pisteuvhte* (present). If the former, it *might* be construed (though by no means necessarily) to mean "come to saving faith." If present, the idea probably would be "continue to believe." At issue is whether the audience is principally believers or non-believers, whether this gospel is

principally evangelistic or confirmatory. Although my own text-critical preference is for the present tense, not much should be made of this either way. Further, even if this document is seen as principally evangelistic, by analogy, would this suggest that the Roman congregation which Paul addresses is also principally unbelievers, on the basis of his statement in 1:15 (as well as the content of the whole book)?! Thus, the purpose of the book is to confirm or strengthen Gentile believers in their faith.” Daniel B. Wallace, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Argument, Outline*, [HTTP://WWW.BIBLE.ORG /PAGE.ASP?PAGE\\_ID=1328](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1328). While I concur with the above assessment, I would amend such to not isolate Jewish believers from the audience of John’s gospel.

18. See Whitacre, 33.

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