

Introduction

Scholars tend to understand believe in certain passages in John (especially, John 2:23; 8:30-31, and 12:42) as disbelieve. We will consider scholarly comments, the range of meaning, types of objects of faith, and then carefully consider these passages.

1. Scholarly Comments

D. A. Carson says about John 2:23, "The people 'believed in his name': the expression is episteusan eis to onoma autou, even though their faith is spurious..."¹ [Emphasis mine]. He claims that believed in His name actually means did not believe in His name.

J. Ramsey Michaels asserts regarding John 8:30,

We have heard this expression [believed in Him] before, when Jesus first came to Jerusalem and "many believed in his name" [John 2:23], and Jesus "would not entrust himself to them" (2:23-24), and again at the same Tent festival [Tabernacles], when "many from the crowd believed in him" (7:31), yet nothing much came of it, as their faith was dismissed as mere "murmuring" (7:32).

Here, too, the faith of the "many" who "believed in him" will quickly turn out to be inadequate.²

D. A. Carson says regarding John 12:42, "The leaders... seem at this point to fit the pattern of inadequate, irresolute, even spurious faith that John repeatedly describes in this Gospel..."³

2. Limits to the Semantic Range of Meaning

3. Types of Objects of Faith in John

Believe resembles teach or ask, because each allows personal AND content objects:

Teaching

- 1. Implicit: Does he teach []?
- 2. Person: Does he teach students?
- 3. Content: Does he teach Greek?
- 4. P + C: Does he teach students Greek?

Asking

- Did you ask []?
- Did you ask Bob?
- Did you ask a question?
- Did you ask Bob a question?

Believing

- 1. Implicit: Did Martha believe []?
- 2. Person: Did Martha believe Jesus (personal direct-object)?⁴
- 3. Content: Did Martha believe that everlasting life is a gift (content direct-object)?
- 4. P + C: Did Martha believe Jesus (person) that everlasting life is a gift (content)?⁵

Gordon Clark rightly proposes that all faith is propositional, "Faith, by definition, is assent to understood propositions. Not all cases of assent, even assent to Biblical propositions, are saving faith; but all saving faith is assent to one or more Biblical propositions."⁶

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, ENG: Apollos, 1991), 184.

² J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 503.

³ Carson, *John*, 450f.

⁴ Another way to express the personal object would be: Did Martha believe in Jesus (personal object)?

⁵ The same sense is present in: Did Martha believe Jesus (person) for everlasting life as a gift (content)?

⁶ Gordon H. Clark, "Faith and Saving Faith," in *What Is Saving Faith?* (N.p.: Trinity Foundation, 1990), 88.

The following shows that John’s usage aligns with Clark’s contention—all faith is propositional.

	Implicit Personal Object	Explicit Personal Object
Implicit Content Object	1 Person [] and content [] implicit	2 <u>Person explicit</u> ; content [] implicit
Explicit Content Object	3 Person [] implicit; <u>content explicit</u>	4 <u>Person and content explicit</u>

In the *Majority Text* of John *pisteuō* appears 100 times. The following lists the ninety-nine times when it means *believe*.⁷ Personal objects have single underlining; content objects have double.

Category 1: Implicit Person [] and Content [] (28 × in John)

1:7, 50; 3:12a-b, 18b; 4:41f, 48, 53; 5:44; 6:36, 64a-b; 9:38; 10:25f; 11:15, 40; 12:39, 47 (*MajT*); 14:29; 16:31; 19:35; 20:8, 25, 29a-b, 31b.

Example: “Both he [the royal official] and his whole household believed []” (4:53)⁸

Category 2: Explicit Person (49 × in John)

1:12 (or content?); 2:11, 23 (or content?); 3:15f, 18a, 18c (or content?), 36; 4:39; 5:24, 38, 46a-b; 6:29f, 35, 40, 47 (*MajT*); 7:5, 31, 38f, 48; 8:30f, 45f; 9:35f; 10:37, 38a, 42; 11:25, 26a, 45, 48; 12:11, 36,⁹ 37, 42, 44a-b, 46; 14:1a-b, 11b (*MajT*), 12; 16:9; 17:20.

Example: “...He who believes in Me [that I am the Bread of Life] has everlasting life...” (6:47)

Category 3: Explicit Content (20 × in John)

2:22; 4:50; 5:47a-b; 6:69; 8:24; 9:18; 10:38b,¹⁰ 38c (*MajT*); 11:26b, 27, 42; 12:38; 13:19; 14:10; 16:27, 30; 17:8, 21; 20:31a.

Example: “...so you may believe [me] [that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God]...” (20:31a)

Category 4. Explicit Person and Content (2 × in John)

4:21; 14:11a.

Example: “Believe Me [that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me]...” (14:11a)

The speaker/writer/communicator may be explicit or implicit. Likewise, the content spoken/written/communicated may be explicit or implicit. The four categories differ in presentation, not substance. John’s decision to alternate between the four categories (some of which have subcategories) never converts *believe* to *disbelieve*. Christendom has gone on an unbelievable rabbit trail.

⁷ BDAG, s.v., “*pisteuō*,” 818, defines it as: “entrust τινί τι [*tini ti*] *someh[ing]*. to someone.” *Pisteuein tini ti* literally means: *to entrust something to someone*. BDAG lists Luke 16:11; John 2:24; Romans 3:2; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Galatians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:11; Titus 1:3 as examples. The presence of both a personal dative and an accusative in John 2:24 signal the meaning *entrust*, not *believe*, so the chart excludes it.

⁸ All Scripture translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

⁹ If “Believe in the light” means “Believe in Jesus,” this classifies under person. If “Believe in the light” refers to the truth spoken by Jesus, it would be content.

¹⁰ I see “believe in the works” as “believe what the works prove,” it would be content.

4. Considering John 2:23; 8:30-31; and 12:42

A. John 2:23 in Context

A-1. Believing in His Name (John 2:23)

John 1:12; John 3:18b

A-2. Believing Because of Seeing Signs (John 2:23)

John 20:30-31. Seeing a sign is seeing its significance: John 6:26

A-3. Jesus Did Not Entrust Himself to Them. When did He entrust Himself to the Eleven?

A-4. Does John Mean What He Says and Say What He Means?

B. John 8:30-31

B-1. The Speakers of 8:33 Are Believers. (Note the *Living Water* translation).

B-2. Does John Mean What He Says and Say What He Means?

C. John 12:42

C-1. Those Denying that a Significant Minority of the Rulers Believed Miss John's Thrust.

C-2. Faith Alone, Not Faith Plus Confession, Is How One Receives Everlasting Life.

Confessing Jesus as the Christ is an issue of rewardability, not life.

C-3. John Said What He Meant and Meant What He Said.

Conclusion