

Does John 3:16's Present Participle Mean Keep-On and Keep-On and Keep-On-Believing?

Message of Life Dr. John Niemelä at the GES Conference, Fort Worth, TX April 26, 2016

Daniel Wallace seemingly rejects the idea that a substantival articular present participle [SAPP] means continually or habitually. So he makes a promising start:

...in Matt[hew] 5:28, 'everyone who looks at a woman' (*pas ho blepōn* [SAPP] *gunaika*) with lust in his heart does not mean 'continually looking' or 'habitually looking,' any more than four verses later [5:32] 'everyone who divorces his wife' (*pas ho apoluōn* [SAPP] *tēn gunaika autou*) means 'repeatedly divorces'!¹ [bold mine]

...*ho baptizōn* in Mark 1:4 does not mean 'the one who continually baptizes' but simply 'the baptizer.' Indeed, it cannot mean this ['continually baptizes'] in Mark 6:14, for otherwise John would be baptizing without a head ('John the baptizer [*ho baptizōn*] has been raised from the dead")!² [bold mine]

However, despite this wise counsel, Wallace ignores his own advice a few paragraphs later:

John 3:16 *pas ho pisteuōn* [SAPP] everyone who believes[.] The idea seems to be both gnomic [proverbial] and continual: "everyone who continually believes." This is not due to the present tense only, but to the use of the present participle of *pisteuō*, especially in soteriological contexts in the NT.³ [emphasis mine]

What is his validation? In a lengthy note he considers the tense of the substantival participle uses of *pisteuō*. Essentially, he says that (since the NT uses present participles of *pisteuō* more frequently than the aorist) the present tense must mean continually believing.⁴

How can he say this after debunking the continual idea in Matthew 5:28, 32; Mark 1:4; and 6:14? He treats the "everyone who" formula (*pas ho ____ōn*) as a gnomic exception:

The *pas ho akouōn* [everyone who hears] (or *agapōn* [loves], *poiōn* [does], etc.) formula is always or almost always generic. As such it is expected to involve a *gnomic* [proverbial] aspect. But if they are already gnomic, we would be hard-pressed to make something more out of them—such as a progressive [e.g., continually] idea.⁵ [bold mine]

Wallace devotes many words in claiming an aspectual idea for present participles. His theology will not let him apply the same grammar rules to John 3:16 as to Matthew 5:28:

...the present substantival participle, even when gnomic, can have a progressive force as well. (There is nothing prohibiting an author from speaking about "everyone who continually does.") This seems to be particularly the case with *ho pisteuōn*. See the discussion [by Wallace himself] at John 3:16 [above]...⁶ [bold mine]

¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, ed. V. D. Verbrugge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 618. [SAPP] = substantival articular present participle; [SAAP] = substantival articular aorist participle.

² Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 620.

³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 620f.

⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 621, n 22, "The aspectual force [e.g., *continual* versus *momentary* belief] of the present *ho pisteuōn* [SAPP] seems to be in contrast with *ho pisteusas* [SAAP]. The aorist is used only eight times (plus two in the longer ending of Mark). It is sometimes used to describe believers... The present occurs six times as often (43 times)... Thus, it...seems unlikely that when the present was used, it was aspectually flat. The present was the tense of choice most likely because the NT writers by and large saw *continual* belief as a necessary condition of salvation... the promise of salvation is almost always given to *ho pisteuōn* [SAPP]... almost never to *ho pisteusas* [SAAP], (apart from Mark 16:16; John 7:39 and Heb 4:3...)." The *MajT* of John 7:39 has a present participle. The other two verses speak of types of post-justification deliverance.

⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 616f.

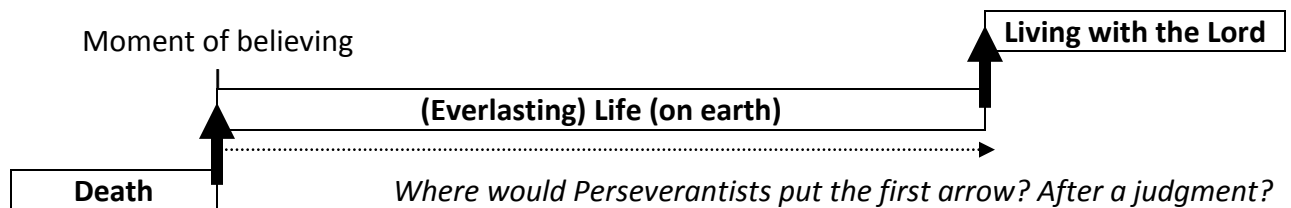
⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 616, n. 11.

My Responses to This (Confined to Verses with SAPP)

1. The first page exposes the theological-conclusion-driven special-pleading by Wallace.

2. For argument's sake, pretend that John 3:16 actually meant: "Everyone who continually believes...has everlasting life." Of course, those who never stop believing have everlasting life. Such an affirmation **WOULD NOT DENY** that momentary faith also results in life everlasting.

3. What about John 5:24? "The one hearing [SAPP] and believing [SAPP] the One who sent Me has everlasting life, does not come into judgment [GWT], but has passed from death into life." The horizontal arrow shows the Perseverantist idea of continuing faith. The first vertical arrow shows that the believer already has passed (perfect tense) from death to life. The second shows the believer transferring into the Lord's presence (at death or the rapture). Wallace's idea that continuing faith is requisite to receiving life conflicts with John 5:24. Interestingly, he alludes to the perfect (*metabebēkan*: has passed),⁷ so his silence on 5:24's SAPP is deafening!



4. John 4:13 uses an articular present participle: "Everyone who drinks [SAPP: *pas ho pinōn*] of [*ek*] this water will thirst again."

The end of the verse disproves the notion of incessant water consumption (water hose).

Ek (of) has a partitive idea here. Upon taking the first sip, one has drunk of the water.

These points inform 4:13. One sip of the water Christ gives (initial faith) is sufficient.

5. John 1:15, 27; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; and 12:13 all use the SAPP formula (*ho erchomenos*) to describe Jesus coming into the world. These passages (and others) deny that continuing action is the focus of such participles. Wallace cannot dismiss these as *gnomic* exceptions.

Conclusion

⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 581. Cf. p. 580, "The aspectual force of the [gnomic] perfect is usually intact, but now it has a distributive value, viz., something that is envisioned on many occasions or for many individuals." Thus, he would see 5:24 as "has passed from death to life." This conflicts with his approach to the verse's SAPP.