



INTRODUCTION

In a manner so typical of First John, as a pericope is finished the final expression functions to set up a new topic which is then developed in the subsequent topics. This is clearly the case with the final declaration of 3:23: καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν, and be this we know that He is residing in us: out of the Spirit which He gave to us.

The axiom expressed in this statement provides a conceptual foundation for what follows in 4:1-6 especially. In what John says then he also picks up images and terminology from many of the previous pericopes in 1:5 - 3:24 in order to communicate new concepts that are bundled together out of the materials in these preceding pericopes. And one should also remember the very basic role of the Prologue in 1:1-4. There the two essential spiritual principles are put on the table as foundational for the entire essay: the incarnational Christ as the life giving Word, and κοινωνία with the Father and with the Son as exemplified in the apostolic Gospel message preached to John's readers in the founding of these churches in Asia some half a century earlier.

These pericopes in chapter four seek to elaborate on these two key spiritual principles beyond what John has already done in the preceding text units of 1:5-3:24.

FIRST JOHN 4:1-6 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

4.1 Ἀγαπητοί, μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, ὅτι πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφήται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον. 2 ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, 3 καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστίν ἤδη.

4.4 Ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστε, τέκνια, καὶ νενικήκατε αὐτούς, ὅτι μείζων ἐστίν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. 5 αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσίν, διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει. 6 ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν, ὃ

γινώσκων τὸν θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. ἐκ τούτου γινώσκομεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης.

NRSV:

4.1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.

4.4 Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

LB 1984:

4.1 Ihr Lieben, glaubt nicht einem jeden Geist, sondern prüft die Geister, ob sie von Gott sind; denn es sind viele falsche Propheten ausgegangen in die Welt. 2 Daran sollt ihr den Geist Gottes erkennen: Ein jeder Geist, der bekennt, dass Jesus Christus in das Fleisch gekommen ist, der ist von Gott; 3 und ein jeder Geist, der Jesus nicht bekennt, der ist nicht von Gott. Und das ist der Geist des Antichrists, von dem ihr gehört habt, dass er kommen werde, und er ist jetzt schon in der Welt.

4 Kinder, ihr seid von Gott und habt jene überwunden; denn der in euch ist, ist größer als der, der in der Welt ist. 5 Sie sind von der Welt; darum reden sie, wie die Welt redet, und die Welt hört sie. 6 Wir sind von Gott, und wer Gott erkennt, der hört uns; wer nicht von Gott ist, der hört uns nicht. Daran erkennen wir den Geist der Wahrheit und den Geist des Irrtums.

COMMENTS

John begins with direct address using the vocative case form Ἀγαπητοί, Beloved. This is a favorite

form for John: 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11. Other forms are *τεκνία*, **little children**: 2:3, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. Also *ἀδελφοί*, **brothers**: 3:13,¹ *παιδιά*, **children**: 2:14, 18. All of these forms are in the plural reflecting John's addressing his readers as groups of people, rather than individuals. Typically the vocative forms are used by writers of ancient Greek to signal shifts in topics. The specific personal words used as vocative forms usually conveys a positive attitude by the writer toward his readers. John's use of *Ἀγαπητοί*, and especially *τεκνία* and *παιδιά* reflect a pastoral feeling toward his readers as the aged apostle writes to people he has known for a long time and many of whom he led to faith commitment to Christ.

John begins with a dual admonition: *μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα*, **do not be believing every spirit, but be putting the spirits to the test**. Axiomatic expressions in the form of imperative verb forms -- both negative and positive forms -- are relatively common in First John.² In almost every instance they are accompanied by a vocative case form.

In 4:1, this axiom contains **don't do this but do that** thrust. Both imperative forms are in the present tense which signals ongoing obligations rather than a momentary responsibility. This stance of testing spirits out of doubting their authenticity is to be a continual stance of believers.³

First, what do the verbal commands advocate? The *μὴ...πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε*, **don't believe but test**, combination is interesting. The first admonition stands in parallel to 3:23b, *πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, **we must believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ**. The idea of *πιστεύω* is not 'believe what they say.' But rather -- and especially clear with the dative case object *παντὶ πνεύματι* -- the idea is 'committing oneself to them.' This parallels itself with the op-

¹As a part of a sentence *ἀδελφοί* is found in 2:9, 10; 3:10, 15, 17; 4:20, 21; 5:16.

²Cf. **2:15**, *Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ*. **Stop loving the world and the things in the world**.

2:28, *μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ*, **Abide in Him**.

3:7, *μηδεὶς πλανᾷτω ὑμᾶς*, **let no one be deceiving you**.

3:13, *μὴ θαυμάζετε*, **stop being amazed**.

3:18, *μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλ' ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ*. **We must not love by word or by tongue, but in deed and in Truth**.

4:1, *μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα*, **Don't believe every spirit, but put the spirits to the test**.

4:7, *ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους*, **Let us love one another**.

5:21, *φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων*. **Guard yourselves from idols**.

³Perhaps this is one of the very few places in First John where a Post-enlightenment reader trained in the Scientific Methodology can feel comfortable with the text. The Scientific Method is built off of questioning the status quo of every premise and established principle.

posite side of *δοκιμάζετε*, testing. Here the idea clearly is not to see whether what they say is consistent with the facts. That's a post enlightenment mindset. Instead the idea clearly in the way *δοκιμάζω* is used in ancient Greek is to put these spirits to the test to see whether they are authentic or not, that is, if who they are, do, and say is consistent with God as the very essence of Truth. In summary, John says strongly to his readers, "Don't commit to any 'spirit' unless it genuinely represents the essence of God."

Second, what are *τὰ πνεύματα*, **the spirits**, that we are to test? John makes use of *πνεῦμα*, spirit, only in chapters four and five with one additional instance in 3:24: 3:24; 4:1, 2, 3, 6, 13; 5:6, 8. The word *πνεῦμα* has a wide range of meanings from the literal meaning of breath to the human spirit to supernatural spirit to the Holy Spirit. The last two of these meanings if what John plays off of in First John.

In this warning of 4:1, John picks up again the earlier discussion of the antichrists in 2:18-27, as 4:3 clearly signals. In the gnosticizing tendencies of the false teachers among the churches of Asia that John writes to here was the belief in intermediary *πνεύματα*, spirits, that stood between the 'believer' and God. Those in a vertical line closest to the believer possess less of the divine qualities and the opposite on the other end of the line with Christ at the top of this line of intermediaries. It was one of these lesser *πνεύματα* who delivered the divine *γνώσις* with saving power to the individual at conversion. Also it was this *πνεῦμα* who enabled the speaking in tongues to validate possession of this saving knowledge.

Now in 4:1-6 we discover that these *πνεύματα* were the super natural teachers of this supposed divine *γνώσις* to converts through visions, dreams etc. as the vehicle of communication from heaven and closest to the convert. No need for scripture! Just get a vision from God through one of these *πνεύματα*! These false teachers were offering a charismatic religion utterly alien to the apostolic Gospel preached by John to the churches.

In 2:20, John countered this phony influence by asserting that genuine commitment to Christ brought *χρῖσμα...ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου*. That is, the grace gift given to believers at conversion provided them with authentic guidance in how to live the Christian life. It brought them directly into the presence of God as *ἀληθεία* (2:21). They did not need this other *γνώσις* being taught by the false teachers (2:26-27).

Now we are beginning to understand that included but not synonymous with *χρῖσμα* (2:20-27) is *τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ* as in the Holy Spirit (4:2). The objective to the testing of every spirit is to determine whether it authen-

tically is from God: εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, *if it is of God*.

Why is such testing necessary? The causal clause ὅτι πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφήται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον, *because many false prophets are gone out into the world*, provides the answer. As the parallel declaration in 2:18, νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, *now many antichrists have come*, makes clear, John uses ἀντίχριστοι and ψευδοπροφήται⁴ to refer to the same group of people who were negatively influencing the churches of Asia. One key trait of these people was οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν, *this one is the antichrist who denies both the Father and the Son* (2:22). What John understands is that these false teachers would not confess Christ as the incarnate Son of God (4:2-3). This stands in direct contradiction to one of the two essential points of the Prologue in 1:1-3: Jesus as the life giving Word was the incarnate God.

In the sentence of vv. 2-3, John uses again his distinct stylistic expression ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε..., *by this we understand...*⁵ What this proposes is how to δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα, test the spirits. John does not leave his readers hanging in regard to putting the 'spirits' to the test.

Clearly the objective is to sleeve out the false spirits in order to determine the true one: ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, *By this we understand the Spirit of God*. John is not focused on identify false teachers but on understanding the Holy Spirit and His working in the lives of believers.

The content of the testing is simple:

ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ·

- 1) **πᾶν πνεῦμα** ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ
- 2) **πᾶν πνεῦμα** ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν·

καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστίν ἤδη.

John sets up two scenarios, this time using a new grammar construction from the past patterns of either a substantial participle phrase or a third class condition protasis. The main clause subject verb is πᾶν πνεῦμα... ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν / ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν, *every spirit ... is from God / is not from God*. The contrasting scenarios are established by the adjectival relative clauses: ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα / ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν, *which confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh / which does not confess Jesus*. The pivot-

⁴4:1 is the only use of ψευδοπροφήτης in First John. And ἀντίχριστος is only used in 2:18, 22 and 4:3, thus linking the two passages together.

⁵Cf. 2:3; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6 (ἐκ τούτου), 13; 5:2. Not counted in this is just the use of the demonstrative pronoun αὕτη (ἐστίν), *this (is)...*, and a variety of other patterns to set up anticipation of the antecedent of the pronoun following it rather than preceding it.

al factor is confessing the authentic Jesus. The Gnostic orientation was to see Christ only as a spirit kind of being and to reject His humanity. In the Prologue (1:1-3) John made it clear that κοινωνία with both God and Jesus was clearly linked to an incarnational Christ as fully human as well as being divine. Confessing / denying Jesus as the Christ was key to whether one is a Christian or not in 2:22-25. And confessing Jesus as the Christ was central to the apostolic Gospel (2:24-25), and denying this was a part of the false teaching being spread among the churches (2:22-23).

Consequently confessing or not confessing Jesus as the Christ is a key method for putting the 'spirits' to the test in 4:2-3. The phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ in both sides of the testing signals whether one is born of God or not.

John adds a connecting addendum to the negative side of the test: καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστίν ἤδη, *and this is that of the antichrist which you have heard is coming, and now is already in the world*. The antecedent of the neuter form of the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτό follows the more common pattern of reaching back to the preceding phrase καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν, *and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God*. To refuse to confess Jesus as the incarnate Christ means one is not born of God. Such refusal is what comes out of the mouth of the antichrist. John's addendum here essentially repeats his statement in 2:18, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, *and just as you have heard that the antichrist comes even now many antichrists have come*. From both these texts it becomes obvious that John regarded these false teachers in the Christian communities of Asia as ἀντίχριστοι, *antichrists*. To be sure, this was a label opposite the one these false teachers would have accepted for themselves. But John is warning the churches to avoid these people at all costs.

In the second subunit of vv. 4-6 John focuses on affirming the genuineness of his readers as true Christians. A series of affirmations about them is how he does this. These affirmations of his readers are in line with previous ones in 2:12-14; 2:20-21; 2:27; 3:1-3.

First, Ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστε, τέκνια, καὶ νενικήκατε αὐτούς, ὅτι μείζων ἐστίν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, *You are of God, little children, and you have overcome them because greater is the One in you than the one in the world*. In 3:20, John reminded his readers that *God is greater than our hearts* when they push us to doubt: μείζων ἐστίν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν. Here the basis of our confidence of being born of God rests upon the presence of God through His Spirit in us being more powerful than the influence of the false spirits being advocat-

ed by the antichrist teachers. The falseness of these spirits is their unwillingness to confess Jesus meaning that they are not from God (v. 3). They exist only in the imagination of these false teachers. But God's Spirit is real and a dynamic force in the life of believers.

Second, αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσὶν, διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει, *they are of the world, because of this they are speaking out of the world and the world hears them.* In a stinging attack John accuses the false teachers of drawing their teachings out of the pagan world around them, rather than from God. They talk in worldly ways with worldly based ideas (cf. 1:8-10 in unwillingness to deal with sin as one example), and a worldly included audience pays attention to them. John adamantly denies the legitimacy of their teachings about Christ as coming from worldly sources. Indeed their compromised version of the gospel set up a false definition of conversion and allowed them to claim to be Christians while continuing to live a pagan lifestyle.

Third in contrast, ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν, ὁ γινώσκων τὸν θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν, *we are from God; the one knowing God hears us, who is not of God does not hear us.* Here John picks up the last two statements of the Prologue in 1:3b-4,

καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη.

and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

The 'we' in both passages refers to John and the apostolic teachers of the true Gospel. This would not have excluded those leaders in the churches of his readers functioning out of this apostolic Gospel, in contrast to the false gospel advocated by these antichrists. The critical test here in 4:6a again is the opposing scenarios of those in the churches who pay attention to this Gospel and those who don't. Consistently John has expressed confidence in the genuineness of commitment to Christ by his readers (2:12-14; 2:20-21; 2:27; 3:1-3), but here he puts them on the spot individually with these two scenarios that force each reader to ask whether he is accepting what John and the true leaders say or not.

Fourth, ἐκ τούτου (=v. 6a) γινώσκομεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης, *out of this we know the spirit of Truth and the spirit of deception.* Which ever scenario (v. 6a) the readers find themselves in signals whether the Holy Spirit is guiding them in the Truth that is God. Or whether they are being misled by the false teachers. In 2:26 John mentions the false teachers deceiving the readers: περὶ τῶν πλανῶντων ὑμᾶς, *concerning those trying to lead you astray.* In 3:7

he admonished his readers, μηδεὶς πλανᾷτω ὑμᾶς, *let no one deceive you.* Thus the clear distinction between authentic and false believers is to be seen in whether they are accepting the teachings of the apostolic based teachers or whether they are accepting that of the false teachers, as described in 2:18-27 and 4:1-6a.

Thus John comes back again to hammer the false teachers for their perversion of the Gospel. This time he adds the dimensions of their teaching on Gnostic intermediary spirits between the individual and God as essential to the 'Christian' experience. Clearly in the adopting of such pagan nonsense into their teaching they prove themselves to be antichrists who refuse to confess the human Jesus as the divine Christ. But John has great confidence in his readers as grounded in the apostolic Gospel and not being misled by these false teachings.

FIRST JOHN 4:7-12 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

7 Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν. 8 ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. 9 ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερώθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ. 10 ἐν τούτῳ ἐστίν ἡ ἀγάπη, οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεόν ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

11 Ἀγαπητοί, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν. 12 θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται. ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν.

NRSV:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

LB 1984:

7 Ihr Lieben, lasst uns einander lieb haben; denn die Liebe ist von Gott, und wer liebt, der ist von Gott geboren und kennt Gott. 8 Wer nicht liebt, der kennt Gott nicht; denn Gott ist die Liebe. 9 Darin ist erschienen die Liebe Gottes unter uns, dass Gott seinen eingebornen Sohn gesandt hat in

die Welt, damit wir durch ihn leben sollen. 10 Darin besteht die Liebe: nicht dass wir Gott geliebt haben, sondern dass er uns geliebt hat und gesandt seinen Sohn zur Versöhnung für unsre Sünden.

11 Ihr Lieben, hat uns Gott so geliebt, so sollen wir uns auch untereinander lieben. 12 Niemand hat Gott jemals gesehen. Wenn wir uns untereinander lieben, so bleibt Gott in uns, und seine Liebe ist in uns vollkommen.

COMMENTS

John cannot go too long without coming back to the second prong of the Prologue implicit in *κοινωνία* (1:3-4). And that is the interrelationships of believers inside the Christian community. In verses seven through ten he gathers up the emphasis on loving one another present in several previous pericopes into a summarizing series of declarations. Interesting also is that John reaches back to most of the distinctive grammar constructions already used and bundles them together here in this series of declarations. But also in typical Johannine manner, he does not just repeat already stated motifs. Also, he expands and reformulates them into new ideas that advance the reader's understanding.⁶

The opening admonition *ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους*, *let us be loving one another*, essentially repeats the same theme in 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, 23 (also 4:8, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21; 5:1, 2). This is one of the more significant implications of *κοινωνία* in the Prologue (1:3-4).

What is new in 4:7 is the content of the *ὅτι* clause that sets forth the foundation for the admonition. Loving one another can serve as the foundation for a larger spiritual principle: 3:14. At other times loving one another is based upon an important spiritual principle: 2:8; 4:12, 19, 21; 5:2. Still at times there is just the admonition to love one other with no particular foundation being given: 2:10; 3:10; 4:7, 11; 5:1. Loving one another is often paired with being committed to God through Christ in some expression: 3:10, 23; 4:8, 11, 19, 20; 5:1, 2.

Here in 4:7 a threefold foundation for the admonition to love one another is given:

- ὅτι 1) ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,
- καὶ 2) πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται
- καὶ 3) γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.

Why are we to love one another? First because love is from God, *ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν*. For the ancient world of the first century the idea that the source of *ἀγάπη* could be deity was rather astounding. Such a posture of *ἀγάπη* was not highly popular in the first

century world to begin with. Only in early Christianity was *ἀγάπη* elevated to a primary level of importance. Elsewhere *ἀγάπη* was reserved for close family and friends exclusively. And even here such attitudes were spotty rather than normative. The idea of it being a general responsibility was scandalous. Very likely out of this dominating attitude in society generally the false teachers placed little value on it and instead promoted a spiritual elitist attitude among their followers.

But as John's gospel narrative about Jesus underscores, loving one another within the Christian communities especially, was a major emphasis of Christ. He even talked about loving one's enemies of all things! This indeed was a radical message for John's Greco-Roman world.

One must remember what *ἀγάπη* means, since the English word love has very little connection to it. Fundamentally to possess *ἀγάπη* toward another person was to take concrete actions for the betterment of the other person in some way or another. As John 3:16 (and 1 John 3:16) illustrates, God's love was God sacrificing His Son to provide redemption for a sinful humanity.

Second, out of the first principle of God being the source of *ἀγάπη* then comes the second principle everyone expressing God's love for others reflecting having been born of God. Spiritual birthing means receiving the character and nature of God into our lives. We become His children and thus will reflect the character of our Heavenly Father.

Third, is the final assertion that is foundational to our obligation to love one another: we know God in a saving relationship. The false teachers claimed that possessing *γνώσις*, *knowledge*, was foundational to *γινώσκων τὸν θεόν*, *knowing God*. No so thunders John! The foundation is possessing the divine *ἀγάπη* which then obligates us to love others in the love of God. This vertical / horizontal dimension of Jewish and early Christian religious commitment was indeed challenging to the surrounding world. But for John as well as for Jesus and the other apostles it was central as it had been understood in the Judaism preceding Christianity.

Out of this initial admonition with its threefold foundation in verse seven then flows several other principles in vv. 8-10. In the framing of these John utilizes several of the more distinctive grammar structures used up to this point in the essay.

In verse eight the principle with a foundation of verse seven is restated as a negative scenario with a foundation: *ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν*: *the one not loving has not known God because God is love*. Thus for one claiming to be a Christian to not express love to others is to signal that he has not come into a saving knowledge of God. The rea-

⁶The Nestle-Aland Greek text in the 27th and 28th editions have seen a 'poetic' structure in vv. 7-10, while the UBS editions have not. Most translations follow the UBS understand of format. What the N-A editors have failed to notice is the utilization of the major grammar patterns distinctive to First John bundled together here in vv. 7-10 but no real poetic structure is built into these.

son for this is clear: ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, *God is love*. Thus the gnostic oriented false teachers by placing the foundation for a saving relationship with God on γνῶσις, *knowledge*, and not teaching and exemplifying ἀγάπη for others, reveal that they have never *known*, οὐκ ἔγνω, God. John bases this charge on the basic principle that ἀγάπη is a major character trait of God, and it is not present in the lives of these teachers.⁷

In verse nine another common grammar structure is used by John to develop the idea of God's love further: ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερώθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ. *By this has the love of God been made clear among us: that His only begotten Son God sent into the world so that we might live through Him.*

The Prologue stress on the incarnational life giving Word as Jesus (1:1-3) comes again to the forefront here. In the Prologue this life giving Word is the basis for κοινωνία in 1:3-4. This fundamental principle of the entire essay is reasserted again here with a focus on the incarnational Word, Jesus of Nazareth, being sent from heaven to earth in order to provide spiritual life (ζήσωμεν) to the Christian communities. In John's formulation in verse nine we see definitional depiction of ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ. God's love is sending His Son into this world.

Out of this principle of God's love being the sending of His Son into this world comes then the declaration in verse ten once again using a relatively common Johannine grammar structure to frame the idea: ἐν τούτῳ ἐστίν ἡ ἀγάπη, οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεὸν ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν. *By this is love: not that we have love God but instead that He Himself love us and sent His Son as sin offering for our sins.* To John's readers comes the clarifying assertion that the ultimate definition of ἀγάπη is not to be found among believers expressing their ἀγάπη to God. Rather just the reverse is where read ἀγάπη is to be seen. It is the love of God in sending His Son as sin offering that we can discover true ἀγάπη. Here John picks up the point made early on in 2:1-2 about Jesus Christ as ἰλασμός ...περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, *sin offering for our sins*. The incarnate Word did not take on human form to impress and stupefy people as the Greco-Roman θεῖος ἀνὴρ religious tradition often claimed for these 'super men' with di-

⁷One should note something very basic to Greek grammar that is not a part of English grammar here. When two nouns are linked by a copulative verb such as 'to be' the noun with the article is ALWAYS the verb subject and the noun without the article is the predicate nominative, which always specifies some character trait of the verb subject. Thus says ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν which can only be translated 'God is love.' It not possible to express it as love is God.

Some cult groups attempt to do this. Additionally their false efforts are also based on love is God rather than ἀγάπη being God.

vine character did. How far into this tradition the false teachers of Asia in First John had moved into is unknown. But just a few decades into the second century when the full blown Gnostic gospel documents began appearing it is very clear that this movement had fully embraced this Greco-Roman tradition and were completely restructuring the life of Christ on the earth within the framework of this dazzling display of supernatural power central to this tradition.⁸

In verses eleven and twelve John pulls this emphasis to a climatic close with an application of the his previous declarations on the central theme on loving one another. Additionally, these verses also contain some criticisms of these false teachers. The three sentences are crafted in the form of an axiomatic principle (v. 11) with amplification in verse twelve.

First, Ἀγαπητοί, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν. *Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* The very essence of vv. 7-10 is pulled together in this declaration. John likes the Greek conditional protasis as a way to express ideas. His favorite one is the third class protasis with ἐάν and the subjunctive mood verb which sets up a potential scenario. But ancient Greek had many options in setting up possible situations. Less common but still used by John is the first class conditional protasis with εἰ with the indicative verb, which is what we find here. Here the potential situation is not presented as a mere possibility, but as an assumption which in turn gives foundation to the main clause conclusion.

Here this means that God has loved us in a specific manner expressed by οὕτως. This adverb here reaches back to vv. 7-10 as its point of reference. John's conclusion to be drawn from such a powerful expression of ἀγάπη from God in sending His Son is that we now as His children are under deep obligation to express this same ἀγάπη to others, particularly inside the Christian community. Note that both the verb ὀφείλομεν and the infinitive ἀγαπᾶν in the present tense form just like ἀγαπῶμεν in v. 7. Believers have an ongoing obligation to express love to one another!

The amplification of this summary axiom in v. 11 is found in the two sentences of verse 12. First, θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται, *God no one has ever seen*. John here repeats what was said in the Prologue of the gospel in Jhn 1:18: Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε, *God no*

⁸The contemporary expression of this Gnostic pattern is to be seen in the vast majority of the modern TV preachers with a so-called healing ministry. The approach to Jesus between the second century Gnostics and these modern preachers is virtually identical. Both have made the fatal error of letting the couture around them define who Jesus has to be, rather than letting Jesus be who He actually was in the first century Jewish world.

one has seen ever. Although θεάομαι is used in First John and ὁράω in the gospel, both are cast in the perfect tense of the Greek which carries the implied sense of to have looked directly upon God with some sort of lasting impact. Interestingly in the fourth gospel, the follow up statement is that Christ as the Logos has explained God to us in His life and teachings: μονογενῆς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο, *the only begotten God, the one being in the lap of the Father, That One has declared Him*. This provides the launch pad into the story of Jesus beginning in 1:19.

But in First John this declaration of the 'invisibility' of God leads John to assert ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν, *If we love one another God abides in us and His love is brought to maturity in us*. In the context of the needs of John's readers in First John the point is made that validation of the presence of this 'invisible' God is His children loving one another. The world can't see God visibly. But like the wind we can know He is present when we see His love coming to mature expression in His children loving one another.

The Gnostic oriented false teachers pinned the reality of God in a mysterious invisibility as pure spirit without human shape or form. His reality was projected in the emotionally charged conversion where He vested secret saving γνώσις into the minds of converts. The presence of this knowledge and thus of God as pure spirit was validated by the speaking in tongues. John couldn't disagree more and instead contends that the validation of the presence of this 'invisible' God is rather to be seen in Christians loving one another. In the ongoing love expression to one another, what emerges is the continuing presence of God and the believing in that presence. And the bottom line conclusion is that the brotherly love is not actually humans expressing ἀγάπη for one another. In actuality, it is the divine ἀγάπη developing into mature expression inside the community of believers.

FIRST JOHN 4:13-21 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

13 Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν. 14 καὶ ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου. 15 Ὃς ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ. 16 καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν.

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει. 17 Ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν

τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ. 18 φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον, ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ. 19 ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς. 20 ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶ, ψεύστης ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ὃν εἴρακεν, τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐχ εἴρακεν οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν. 21 καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

NRSV:

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

LB 1984:

13 Daran erkennen wir, dass wir in ihm bleiben und er in uns, dass er uns von seinem Geist gegeben hat. 14 Und wir haben gesehen und bezeugen, dass der Vater den Sohn gesandt hat als Heiland der Welt. 15 Wer nun bekennt, dass Jesus Gottes Sohn ist, in dem bleibt Gott und er in Gott. 16 Und wir haben erkannt und geglaubt die Liebe, die Gott zu uns hat.

Gott ist die Liebe; und wer in der Liebe bleibt, der bleibt in Gott und Gott in ihm. 17 Darin ist die Liebe bei uns vollkommen, dass wir Zuversicht haben am Tag des Gerichts; denn wie er ist, so sind auch wir in dieser Welt. 18 Furcht ist nicht in der Liebe, sondern die vollkommene Liebe treibt die Furcht aus; denn die Furcht rechnet mit Strafe. Wer sich aber fürchtet, der ist nicht vollkommen in der Liebe. 19 Lasst uns lieben, denn er hat uns zuerst geliebt. 20 Wenn jemand spricht: Ich liebe Gott, und hasst seinen Bruder, der ist ein Lügner. Denn wer seinen Bruder nicht liebt, den er sieht, der kann nicht Gott lieben, den er nicht sieht. 21 Und dies Gebot haben wir von ihm, dass, wer Gott liebt, dass der auch seinen Bruder liebe.

COMMENTS

In this final unit of text in chapter four, some of the same themes in 4:1-12 are continued and they continue to expand the double motif of the Prologue (1:1-4) of the life giving Word as the human Jesus and Him as foundational to *κοινωνία* with God and Christ as well as with other believers in Christian communities.⁹ In 4:13-16a the focus remains on Jesus and in 16b-21 on God's love in connection to loving one another.

John **begins** with his typical sentence structure in verse thirteen: Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν, *By this we know that we are abiding in Him and He is us: because out of His Spirit He has given to us.* This repeats 3:24c, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν, *and by this we know that we abide in Him, out of His Spirit He gave to us.* It was this declaration that set up the discussion in 4:1-12, where both 'abiding' (cf. also 2:6, 12, 14, 17, 24, 27, 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 24a; 34 uses in 1 John) and the Holy Spirit are important motifs..

Our confidence of being in *κοινωνία* with God, which here is defined as ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, *we abide in Him and He in us*, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This brings the 'invisible God' (v. 12) into our lives as a real presence that we can know and experience.

The **second assertion** is in v. 14: καὶ ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατήρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου. *And we have seen and are witnessing that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world.* The emphasis on Christ in the Prologue is picked up again after having been stressed via the designation as Son, υἱὸς, in 1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10 (cf. also 5:5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20). In earlier references the work of Christ as σωτήρα, Saviour, has been described but this is the first time the label σωτήρα has been used: cf. 1:7, 2:1; 3:8; 4:9, 10. The stress on τοῦ κόσμου, *the world*, is also found 2:2, καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, *and He is sin offering for our sins, not just for ours only, but also for the whole world.*

The **third assertion** in v. 15 grows out of the second: Ὅς ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ, *Whoever would confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.* The confessing of Jesus as the Christ is asserted in 2:23; 4:2, 3, and here in 4:15. The gnosticizing opponents of John in the churches of Asia would not make this confession that the human Jesus

⁹A third motif in the Prologue especially in vv. 3-4 is that the way to discovering this Christ and this *κοινωνία* is exclusively through the apostolic Gospel that the readers heard proclaimed to them at the beginning of their Christian journey.

was also the divine Son of God. John vigorously denies this and asserts the necessity of such confession. It means the presence of God in the believer and his existence with God.

The **fourth assertion** in v. 16a both sums up 4:1-15 and sets the stage for vv. 16b-21: καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, *we have come to know and believe the love which God has in us.* Notice paralleling of ἐγνώκαμεν and πεπιστεύκαμεν as synonymous expressions both in the perfect tense. At a previous point in time -- the conversion moment -- discovery and commitment were expressed in Christ as the love of God and this had lasting impact (as per the Greek perfect tense verbs). But in that moment of surrender to God His love was implanted into the life of the believer to continue to impact and change the way of living.

The nature and extent of the impact of this implanted love of God is now expanded in vv. 16b-21.

First comes the topic sentence as foundation to what follows: Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, *God is love and the one abiding in this love abides in God and God abides in him.* The love of God is also a repeated theme in First John: 2:5, 15: 3:1, 16, 17; 4:7; 8, 9, 10, 12 (cf. also 4:17, 18; 5:3). The first clause Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν repeats exactly 4:8b. In both places John asserts, over against his gnosticizing opponents who stressed γνῶσις, that the defining trait of God is instead ἀγάπη. The reciprocal 'abiding' concept -- God in us / we in Him -- expressed earlier in 3:24 and 4:13 is repeated here. In 3:24 it was linked to obeying His commandments; in 4:13 to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now it is linked to the love of God.

Second comes the declaration on further impacts of this divine love (v. 17): Ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ. *By this is love brought to maturity among us, so that we might have courage in the Day of Judgment: because just as Than One is so we are to be in this world.* How does the love of God in us impact us? It enables us to live and become the same kind of person that Christ was in this world. One particularly important result of this (ἵνα clause) is to give us courage to face a holy God on the day of judgment.

In verse 18 comes some amplification of the axiom in verse 17: φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον, ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ. *Fear is not in love but mature love casts out fear because fear is concerned with punishment, and the one fearing has not matured in love.* What John expands upon in verse 17

in this declaration is the opposite of παρρησίαν which is φόβος as he is defining the word here. When the believer begins to comprehend the over powering nature of final judgment before a perfectly holy God and understands that he is completely accountable for every word, deed, and thought over the span of his entire life, such is enough to generate real dread and fear of this coming event.

John reassures his readers as authentic believers in Christ that by allowing the love of God to come to full maturity in their lives now prior to that day they can anticipate it without immobilizing fear and dread. Love is the only antidote to fear (φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ). When love comes to maturity in our lives it will push out this fear and dread (ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἕξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον). The reason for this is simple: ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, [because fear is concerned with punishment](#). What a profound insight! Our fear of the day of judgment is not really a fear of God or of God examining us. Rather it is looking beyond judgment to sentencing and the punishments that may be imposed upon us for failure.

John continues on to assert the importance of love rather than fear: ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ. [And the one fearing has not reached maturity in love](#). As long as fear disrupts our devotion to God we know that we have a lot more growing up to do in the love of God.¹⁰

Third comes the natural axiom of an admonition to love: ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, [Let us be loving because He first loved us](#). Although ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν could be taken as indicative, we love, rather than as a hortatory subjunctive, [let us be loving](#), the though flow here favors the admonition understanding over the declaration view. With the previous emphases on love and fear and their impacts in 16b-18 the natural conclusion is to encourage his readers to be loving. Again this admonition is repeating a common theme throughout the essay: 3:11, 18, 23; 4:7, 11.

And the foundation of our obligation to love is the prior love of God for us: ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, [because He first loved us](#). This same idea is expressed in 4:11.

Fourth the final emphasis is to extend this obligation to be loving to our fellow Christian (vv. 20-21): 20 ἔάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῆ, ψεύστης ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν

αὐτοῦ ὃν ἐώρακεν, τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐχ ἐώρακεν οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν. 21 καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ. [If anyone may claim, "I love God," and then hate his brother, he is a liar, for the one not loving his brother has never been able to see, not having seen God they are unable to love. And this commandment we have from Him: the one loving God must also love his brother.](#)

John comes to explain that ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, let us be loving (v. 19), includes both loving God and loving our fellow Christian. The two expressions of love cannot be split; they are completely inner dependent on one another. Once more he reaches back to the fundamental religious principle of the vertical / horizontal obligations of authentic religion. We cannot love God without loving others around us. And the reverse is just as true. We cannot love others apart of the love of God being actively present in our lives.

In summing up with vv. 20-21 John reaches out to some of the early grammar structures in chapters one and two as the framing devices for his ideas. The scenarios in the third class conditional protasis (v. 20a) is reinforced by the substantival participle scenario (v. 20b) with the causal γὰρ linking them together. Then comes in v. 21 the ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ main clause with the meaning of the commandment defined by the subsequent ἵνα clause expressing a divine mandate. See 3:23 for similar grammar structure.

CONCLUSION

The deeper we go into First John the more fascinating and clearer his writing strategy becomes. Everything in the entire essay is built off the Prologue in 1:1-4. By chapter four he is beginning to largely repeat the string of early expansions of the Prologue in chapters one through three. But as he develops each of the expansion motifs through repeating core ideas he also adds new elements. Thus little by little John is expanding the core motifs of Christ and κοινωμία with the critical role of the apostolic Gospel in the Prologue (1:1-4). With each repetition of the early expansion statements new perspectives are added thus advancing our understanding. Additionally, sometimes John brings different expansion statements together in establishing new connections.

In chapter four a lot of emphasis has been given to the love of God and the validating of ideas presented by teachers in the communities. John severely condemns basing one's religious experience on a conversion moment reception of γνῶσις with glossolalia as the validation of κοινωμία with God. Love is the defining trait of God and we know this love through the incarnate Jesus' example and teachings. Confessing Him and loving one's fellow believers are critical then to authentic Christianity. This is also the standard for testing of the teachers. Also this is central to preparing for the final Day of Judgment of believers by God.

¹⁰One of my observations over a half a century of ministry plus is that a large percentage of church folks don't even have enough understanding of what the coming Day of Judgment will be like in order to be scared spitless by it. Our day is in worse condition than John's Christian readers at the end of the first century. Could it be that the leaders teaching the apostolic Gospel in those churches in ancient Asia did a better job than church leaders do in our day in communicating the details of the coming Final Judgment of God on believers?