



INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter of First John we will notice a continuation of a pattern very prominent in chapter four. John continues to repeat earlier expansion elements of the Prologue in 1:1-3. And as usual when he repeats -- or combines two or three -- he will add new insights as conclusions or implications of the repeated expansion element.

In chapter five a lot of emphasis will be placed on Christ as the Son of God, and as the object of committed faith surrender. Most of the major expansion elements of chapters one and two will be repeated but with new implications brought out.

FIRST JOHN 5:1-4 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

5.1 Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γενένηται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ. 2 ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅταν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ποιῶμεν. 3 αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, καὶ αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ βαρεῖαι οὐκ εἰσὶν. 4 ὅτι πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον· καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν.

NRSV:

5.1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

LB 1984:

5.1 Wer glaubt, dass Jesus der Christus ist, der ist von Gott geboren; und wer den liebt, der ihn geboren hat, der liebt auch den, der von ihm geboren ist. 2 Daran erkennen wir, dass wir Gottes Kinder lieben, wenn wir Gott lieben und seine Gebote halten. 3 Denn das ist die Liebe zu Gott,

dass wir seine Gebote halten; und seine Gebote sind nicht schwer. 4 Denn alles, was von Gott geboren ist, überwindet die Welt; und unser Glaube ist der Sieg, der die Welt überwunden hat.

COMMENTS

In this first subunit of vv. 1-4, John begins with his substantival participle scenarios as foundational declarations: Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γενένηται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ. *Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone loving the one born in love is the one born of Him.*

The emphasis on πιστεύων first surfaced in 3:23 and was then repeated in 4:1 and 4:16. At first the idea was couched in the form of a command from God in 3:23: ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *that we must believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.* Here the same idea is framed as Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, *everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ.*

The identity of Jesus is first asserted in the Prologue (1:3): μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *with His Son Jesus Christ.* Both the titles and names υἱός and Ἰησοῦς and Χριστός will then surface in a variety of combinations in 1:7; 2:1, 22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15; 5:1 (cf. also 5:5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 20).

In this way John presses home Jesus as the object of faith commitment as the incarnate Christ who is the Son of God. This was an understanding completely unacceptable to John's gnosticizing opponents in Asia. The expression ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, *that Jesus is the Christ,* was the heart of their problem. The human Jesus could not have been the pure spirit called Christ and Son of God.

The conclusion about the individual committing himself to Jesus as the divine Christ is simply that ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γενένηται, *he is born of God.* The perfect tense passive voice underscores the prior experience of being born again with God as Father. This new birth then impacts one's life continually from that point on. Again this idea of being born of God is a repeat from 2:29;p

3:9; 4:7 (cf. also 5:4, 18). The idea earlier was linked to not sinning (3:9) and loving others (4:7). Then in 5:4 it is linked to overcoming the world and not sinning (5:18) with God's protection from the evil one (5:18). Here in 5:1 it is linked to πιστεύων.

In the second scenario set up by John he employs a new way to describe the obligation to love one another: καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ, *and everyone loving the one having given birth in love also is the one born of Him*. This repeats the idea in 4:7 on the same theme that links up loving one other to God's love and being born of God. The singular form τὸν γεννήσαντα clearly refers to God as the One birthing children, and the object of the believer's love. What may be intended is the giving birth to the Son, although verse two would argue for a broader understanding of all the children of God, rather than just the Son.

What John attempts to accomplish in the framing of these two scenarios is the same point in 4:7: that believing in Christ and loving other Christians is inseparably linked. One cannot do one without the other!

In his usual use of ἐν τούτῳ to look forward for an antecedent, John links loving God's children to loving God and keeping His commandments. The antecedent of τούτῳ is the indefinite temporal clause introduced by ὅταν. Thus, we know that we love God's children whenever we love God and keep His commandments. In this John links loving others to loving God and obeying Him, just as he did in 2:10 the first time, and then repeated the connection in different ways in 3:10-11; 3:23; 4:7-12, 20, 5:1.

In verse three while using a familiar grammar structure (αὕτη...ἐστίν...; this is...; cf. 1:5; 2:22, 25; 3:10, 11, 23; 4:3, 17 [see also 5:6, 9, 14]), John makes a declaration which is attached to verse two via the causal co-ordinate conjunction γάρ, *for*, as the foundation for verse two. The antecedent of αὕτη is the subsequent ἵνα clause. The feminine form of the demonstrative pronoun is established by the feminine noun ἀγάπη, to which the pronoun is linked via the copula verb ἐστίν. Otherwise the demonstrative pronoun would have been the neuter form τοῦτο.

Within the framework of this distinctive Johannine grammar structure John defines the nature of ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, *the love of God*. The definition here is a part of several definitions already presented in First John: 2:5, obeying His Word; 3:1, that we could be called God's children; 3:16, Christ laying down His life for us; 3:17, helping a brother in need; 4:7, being born of God; 4:9, sending His Son so that we might have life; 4:10, sending His Son as sacrifice for our sins; 4:16, enabling us to have our existence in God; 4:17, giving us courage for the Day of Judgment.

Here God's love is defined as ἵνα τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, *that we must keep His commandments*. God's love places us under the obligation of obedience. But this obedience, τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, is linked to other spiritual aspects as well in First John: knowing God (2:3-4); achieving maturity in the love of God (2:5); condition for answered prayer (3:22); abiding in God (3:24). This is the fuller picture of obeying God's commandments in First John.

The other distinctly new aspect is John's follow up assertion: καὶ αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ βαρεῖαι οὐκ εἰσίν, *and His commandments are not heavy*. The picture painted by them not being βαρεῖαι, heavy, is not because they are few in number or don't make many demands upon us. This is the exclusive use of the adjective βαρύς, -εῖα, -ύ in First John and literally defines something a weighing a lot. This then can imply something being burdensome or difficult to do, carry etc. In the context of the many references to keeping God's commandments in First John, one would have to conclude that by this statement John means we as believers have God's presence and help through His Spirit (2:5; 3:24) that enable us to obey successfully. Unlike either those in the Jewish Torah, or the gnosticizing teachers, the authentic believer has God working in his life to enable him to function in a manner pleasing to God (3:22). This lifts the burden to obedience to something very 'doable.'

This very point is made by John in verse four in amplification of verse three: ὅτι¹ πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον· καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἣ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν. *For everyone born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory which overcomes the world: our faith*. Thus being born of God is linked to victory over the pressures of the world. And central to such victory is our faith commitment to God through Christ. Here the new aspect is linking success over worldliness to being born of God with faith commitment as the key response. Once again John takes a shot at the gnosticizing tendencies of the false teachers who according to 1:8-10 miserably failed to resist worldliness by not dealing with sins in their lives as professing Christians. This stands as a warning to us as believers in the modern world.

FIRST JOHN 5:5-12 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

5 Τίς [δέ] ἐστὶν ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 6 οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστὶν ἡ ἀλήθεια. 7 ὅτι τορεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, 8 τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ

¹The ὅτι conjunction links v. 4 to v. 3 as the causal foundation.

τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν. 9 εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν, ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων ἐστίν· ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. 10 ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐν αὐτῷ, ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποιήκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

11 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία, ὅτι ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεός, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν. 12 ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν· ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει.

NRSV:

5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. 7 There are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. 9 If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. 10 Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.

11 And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

LB 1984:

5 er ist es aber, der die Welt überwindet, wenn nicht der, der glaubt, dass Jesus Gottes Sohn ist? 6 Dieser ist's, der gekommen ist durch Wasser und Blut, Jesus Christus; nicht im Wasser allein, sondern im Wasser und im Blut; und der Geist ist's, der das bezeugt, denn der Geist ist die Wahrheit. 7 Denn drei sind, die das bezeugen: 8 der Geist und das Wasser und das Blut; und die drei stimmen überein. 9 Wenn wir der Menschen Zeugnis annehmen, so ist Gottes Zeugnis doch größer; denn das ist Gottes Zeugnis, dass er Zeugnis gegeben hat von seinem Sohn. 10 Wer an den Sohn Gottes glaubt, der hat dieses Zeugnis in sich. Wer Gott nicht glaubt, der macht ihn zum Lügner; denn er glaubt nicht dem Zeugnis, das Gott gegeben hat von seinem Sohn.

11 Und das ist das Zeugnis, dass uns Gott das ewige Leben gegeben hat, und dieses Leben ist in seinem Sohn. 12 Wer den Sohn hat, der hat das Leben; wer den Sohn Gottes nicht hat, der hat das Leben nicht.

COMMENTS

Some commentators argue that verse five should be considered as a boundary marking terminus inclusio to vv. 1-5. But the failure of this is to see the larger role of verse five. The definitional ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, the one believing that Jesus is

the Son of God, in verse five does parallel ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, that Jesus is the Christ, in 5:1. But the statement (formed in the negative in 5:5, μὴ ὁ πιστεύων..., not believing...) serves as a κεφαλή, linking header that links together the two paragraphs of vv. 1-4 and 5-12.² The second paragraph continues the discussion in vv. 1-4 but also advances the ideas into new expression.

The grammar shift in v. 5 to a rhetorical question signals a slight topic shift coming in the subsequent material, as well as sets the stage for this discussion by defining the topic in a question: Τίς [δέ] ἐστὶν ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; *And who is the one overcoming the world, except the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God?* Already faith commitment to Jesus as the Christ has been made a prominent theme out of the Prologue emphasis (1:1-4): 3:23; 5:1. Here John links it to the concept of victory over the world, which is another repeated motif in the essay: 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4. Note that in 2:14 overcoming the world equals overcoming the evil one. Once again the stress is on faith commitment to the human Jesus as the incarnate Christ / Son of God, in contradiction of the gnosticizing teachers.

The human side of Jesus receives the first amplification in vv. 6-9. Three assertions are contained in this initial amplification.

First (v. 6), οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια. *This One is the One coming by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only but by water and by blood; and the Spirit is the One giving witness because the Spirit is Truth.* Several new expansion ideas are put before us here. The Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, *Jesus Christ having come in the flesh* (4:2), that we are to confess is genuinely human, rather than some kind of pure spirit being who merely looked human without truly being human.

This is why John stresses both water and blood, δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι. Most likely this is the most controversial statement in all of First John!³

²Although John employs this ver Jewish device massively, he does so mostly by repetition in separate parts of the essay, rather than in consecutive sequential paragraphs. .

³“What does John mean by saying that Jesus Christ ‘came by water and blood; not in water only, but in water and in blood’? The original reference was no doubt easily accessible to John’s readers, but it is less obvious to us. There are three major approaches to the explanation of this passage.

(a) The ‘water and blood’ have been taken to refer to the two sacraments of baptism (water) and the eucharist (blood). So Cullmann, *Christian Worship*, 110 n. 1; cf. Westcott, 182. Sometimes this reference is confined to the second mention of ‘water and blood,’ later in the v (so Malatesta, *Interiority*, 312); although

Haas (Handbook, 119) correctly points out that the nouns in both parts of the *v* must be taken in the same sense. However, such a sacramental interpretation, which runs back to Luther and Calvin, involves difficulties. (i) John is concerned here with the historical presence and incarnate life of Jesus on earth, not with his continuing manifestation in the sacramental life of the Church. (ii) This fact is underlined by John's use of the aorist ὁ ἐλθὼν (literally, 'the one who came'), which suggests a definite moment in history (the Incarnation), rather than a repeated appearance in the sacraments (cf. 4:2). (iii) The use of the term αἷμα ('blood') as a synonym for the eucharist is strange, and without parallel. (iv) There is no suggestion that the sacramental presence of Jesus in the experience of believers was a problem to members of the Johannine community. (v) The second statement in this *v* ('not in water only ...') makes it clear that a meaning must be found for these terms which allows them to be distinguished; whereas the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper manifestly complement each other.

It is 'just possible' that a secondary allusion to the sacraments is present in this *v* (Marshall, 233 n. 8), if a similar reference is to be discovered at *v* 8. But, in any case, it is unlikely.

(b) A second line of exegesis, which goes back to Augustine, associates the reference to 'water and blood' in this *v* with John 19:34–35 (the spear-thrust at the crucifixion of Jesus, which resulted in a 'flow of blood and water' from his side and the subsequent "testimony" of the beloved disciple). So Williams, 55–57. A further problem then is the correct interpretation of the passage in John 19. The fourth evangelist's approach to the passion of Jesus is neither symbolic (the blood and water stand for the 'cleansing and life-giving' work of Christ; Brooke 133) nor sacramental (the spear-thrust connects the Lord's death with baptism and the eucharist; Cullmann, *Christian Worship*, 114–16; cf. also Westcott, 181–82; Williams, 56–57). The incident of the spear-thrust in John's Gospel primarily expresses the historical truth that Jesus really died (cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* [2nd ed. London: SPCK, 1978], 556; Smalley, John, 129–30, 224–25). On that showing it may perhaps be linked to this passage in 1 John, since the subject here is also the reality (and truth) of the incarnation.

But even then serious problems arise. (i) The order of the words differs. 'Blood and water' in John 19:34 become 'water and blood' here. (ii) The meaning of the verb ὁ ἐλθὼν ('who came') has to be forced if it is to refer to the incident of the spear-thrust. 'Blood and water' on that occasion came from Jesus; but in this *v* John is saying that Jesus came 'by or in water and blood.' (iii) The 'testimony' in John 19 is given by the observer, whereas in the present *v* the witness to Jesus is provided by the water and blood (and Spirit). (iv) Connecting *v* 6 with John 19:34–35 does not really account for the qualification in the later part of the sentence ('not in water only, but in water and in blood'); indeed, it makes nonsense of it.

(c) A more natural explanation of John's thought at this point is possible. The majority of commentators rightly see that the chief reference of the 'water and blood' in *v* 6 is neither to the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist nor to the blood and water which flowed from the side of Jesus according to John 19:34. Rather, John is speaking here of the terminal points in the earthly ministry of Jesus: his baptism at the beginning, and his crucifixion at the end (such an interpretation was followed by Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16; although his reference to it also reveals the early connection which was made between this passage and the incident of the spear-thrust). Historically Jesus 'came' into his power

In my estimation all three of the typical interpretations completely ignore the contextual setting of this phrase, which was to assert the full humanity of Jesus in contradiction to the false teachers denial of such. Thus water and blood must be understood as evidential indicators of the humanity of Jesus. If they some how are linked to Jesus baptism and death on the cross, they must not be interpreted as signals of redemption or of the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God since that is not what John is trying to assert in vv. 5-6! The best conclusion is simply that to John's initial readers water and blood clearly signaled humanity and John adamantly asserts this about Jesus here.

The decisive witness affirming this is the Holy Spirit: καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια, and the Spirit is the One giving testimony because the Spirit is the Truth. The roles of the Holy Spirit has already been put on the table by John: assures us of our existence in God (3:13); helps us confess Jesus as the Christ (4:2); is a reflection of God as Truth (4:6); having the Spirit in us is the consequence of abiding in God (4:13). From this we detect that ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια, because the Spirit is the Truth, repeats 4:6. Consequently it becomes the basis for the assertion that τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, the Spirit is the One witnessing. This is quite normal. Since the Spirit is the very essence of God as Truth, He would be the best possible witness to the humanity of Jesus as also the divine Christ.

Verses seven and eight presented a challenge to later copyists of this text that some of them could not resist. Thus much later manuscripts -- picked up by the Vulgate and then by the English Bible through the KJV -- is an extensive liturgical insertion with a trinitarian emphasis in verses seven and eight.⁴ But the original

and authority by the 'water' of his baptism, at which point he was declared to be God's Son (Mark 1:11; John 1:34); and he 'came' into his power and authority in an even more ultimate sense by the 'blood' of his cross, a moment which the fourth evangelist describes as the "glorification" of Christ (John 17:1). Cf. 4:2."

[Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 277–278.]

⁴"After μαρτυροῦντες the Textus Receptus adds the following: ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Πατήρ, ὁ Λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι. (8) καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῆ. That these words are spurious and have no right to stand in the New Testament is certain in the light of the following considerations.

(A) EXTERNAL EVIDENCE. (1) The passage is absent from every known Greek manuscript except eight, and these contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate. Four of the eight manuscripts contain the passage as a variant reading written in the margin as a later addition to the manuscript. The eight manuscripts are as follows:

61: codex Montfortianus, dating from the early sixteenth century.

wording of the text begins in v. 7 with ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, *because three are the ones witnessing*. These three give testimony to the human Jesus as the Christ. Then in v. 8, these are named: τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ

88v.r.: a variant reading in a sixteenth century hand, added to the fourteenth-century codex Regius of Naples.

221v.r.: a variant reading added to a tenth-century manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

429v.r.: a variant reading added to a sixteenth-century manuscript at Wolfenbüttel.

636v.r.: a variant reading added to a sixteenth-century manuscript at Naples.

918: a sixteenth-century manuscript at the Escorial, Spain.

2318: an eighteenth-century manuscript, influenced by the Clementine Vulgate, at Bucharest, Rumania.

“(2) The passage is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers, who, had they known it, would most certainly have employed it in the Trinitarian controversies (Sabellian and Arian). Its first appearance in Greek is in a Greek version of the (Latin) Acts of the Lateran Council in 1215.

“(3) The passage is absent from the manuscripts of all ancient versions (Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic), except the Latin; and it is not found (a) in the Old Latin in its early form (Tertullian Cyprian Augustine), or in the Vulgate (b) as issued by Jerome (codex Fuldensis [copied A.D. 541–46] and codex Amiatinus [copied before A.D. 716]) or (c) as revised by Alcuin (first hand of codex Vallicellianus [ninth century]).

“The earliest instance of the passage being quoted as a part of the actual text of the Epistle is in a fourth century Latin treatise entitled Liber Apologeticus (chap. 4), attributed either to the Spanish heretic Priscillian (died about 385) or to his follower Bishop Instantius. Apparently the gloss arose when the original passage was understood to symbolize the Trinity (through the mention of three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood), an interpretation that may have been written first as a marginal note that afterwards found its way into the text. In the fifth century the gloss was quoted by Latin Fathers in North Africa and Italy as part of the text of the Epistle, and from the sixth century onwards it is found more and more frequently in manuscripts of the Old Latin and of the Vulgate. In these various witnesses the wording of the passage differs in several particulars. (For examples of other intrusions into the Latin text of 1 John, see 2.17; 4.3; 5.6, and 20.)

“(B) INTERNAL PROBABILITIES. (1) As regards transcriptional probability, if the passage were original, no good reason can be found to account for its omission, either accidentally or intentionally, by copyists of hundreds of Greek manuscripts, and by translators of ancient versions.

“(2) As regards intrinsic probability, the passage makes an awkward break in the sense.

“For the story of how the spurious words came to be included in the Textus Receptus, see any critical commentary on 1 John, or Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 101 f.; cf. also Ezra Abbot, “1. John v. 7 and Luther’s German Bible,” in *The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel and Other Critical Essays* (Boston, 1888), pp. 458–463.”

[Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 647–649.]

τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσὶν. *The Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are one in agreement*. Clearly in the background stands the OT Jewish judicial principle that the correctness of a testimony is established when two or three witnesses agree in their testimony (cf. Deut. 19:15, also John 8:17-18). Thus for John in his world, especially the Jewish side of it, the testimony of Jesus’ humanity is absolutely established.

This is exactly his point in verse 9: εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν, ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων ἐστίν· ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, *Since we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, because this is the witness of God that He witnessed to concerning His Son*. John does not argue the correctness of the threefold testimony from Jewish law; this would have held little appeal either to the non Jewish believers among his initial readers, and especially not to his opponents among the churches. Rather he asserts the common acceptance of human testimony (note 1st class condition protasis) and then contends that God’s witness is more reliable than any human witness. Again this reasoning pattern would have been more persuasive to many of his initial readers. Don’t overlook here that John equates the witness of the Spirit as being that of God.

But what becomes very significant for John in v. 10 is how this witness of God through the Holy Spirit functions. He presents this in a double scenario using the substantival participle construction: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐν αὐτῷ, ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποιήκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. *The one believing in the Son of God has this witness in him; the one not believing God makes Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness which God gave witness to about His Son*. John’s persuasiveness steps up a notch here. The first scenario of one committing himself to the Son of God thus possesses the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit of God giving validation this Christ is indeed the Son of God. The second scenario, however, shifts to the not believing perspective and with stinging rebuke John asserts that such makes God out to be a liar. This is based (causal ὅτι clause) on not having accepted that God’s testimony about His Son is consistent with a holy and righteous God who cannot claim something inconsistent with His own nature.

But the divine witness extends itself further as verses 11-12 assert: 11 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία, ὅτι ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεός, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν. 12 ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν· ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει. *And this is*

the witness: eternal life God has given us, and this life is in His Son. The one possessing the Son has life; the one not possessing the Son of God does not have life.

Once again very familiar grammar structures are used to frame John's ideas. The forward looking demonstrative pronoun αὕτη serves to anticipate the additional meaning of the μαρτυρία which comes out of the previous discussion on witness in vv. 7-10, and especially vv. 9-10. This new aspect of the μαρτυρία is that ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεός, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, *God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son*. Note how John returns again to the Prologue statement (1:1) περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς, *concerning the life giving Word*, who is then defined as Jesus (1:2). It is in this life giving Word that we have κοινωνία with God (1:3).

John wraps up this discussion with the often repeated double scenario pitting the positive against the negative (v. 12): ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν· ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει, *the one having the Son has life; the one not having the Son of God does not have life*. This pulls together repeated assertions through 1:5-5:10 about the connection of Jesus as the Son of God to eternal life. Thus the summary states the case in two clear cut options. If you desire eternal life, you can only discover it through Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Connecting to Him comes through faith commitment that produces a life of obedience with its many facets. If there is unwillingness to connect up to Christ, then forget ever possessing eternal life.

FIRST JOHN 5:13-21 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

13 Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. 14 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. 15 καὶ ἐάν οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὁ ἐάν αἰτώμεθα, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

16 Ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ. 17 πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, καὶ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον.

18 Οἶδαμεν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, ἀλλ' ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ. 19 οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται. 20 οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει καὶ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ ἐσμέν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος.

21 Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων.

NRSV:

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

16 If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

18 We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them. 19 We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

LB 1984:

13 Das habe ich euch geschrieben, damit ihr wisst, dass ihr das ewige Leben habt, die ihr glaubt an den Namen des Sohnes Gottes. 14 Und das ist die Zuversicht, die wir haben zu Gott: Wenn wir um etwas bitten nach seinem Willen, so hört er uns. 15 Und wenn wir wissen, dass er uns hört, worum wir auch bitten, so wissen wir, dass wir erhalten, was wir von ihm erbeten haben.

16 Wenn jemand seinen Bruder sündigen sieht, eine Sünde nicht zum Tode, so mag er bitten und Gott wird ihm das Leben geben – denen, die nicht sündigen zum Tode. Es gibt aber eine Sünde zum Tode; bei der sage ich nicht, dass jemand bitten soll. 17 Jede Ungerechtigkeit ist Sünde; aber es gibt Sünde nicht zum Tode.

18 Wir wissen, dass, wer von Gott geboren ist, der sündigt nicht, sondern wer von Gott geboren ist, den bewahrt er und der Böse tastet ihn nicht an. 19 Wir wissen, dass wir von Gott sind, und die ganze Welt liegt im Argen. 20 Wir wissen aber, dass der Sohn Gottes gekommen ist und uns den Sinn dafür gegeben hat, dass wir den Wahrhaftigen erkennen. Und wir sind in dem Wahrhaftigen, in seinem Sohn Jesus Christus. Dieser ist der wahrhaftige Gott und das ewige Leben.

21 Kinder, hütet euch vor den Abgöttern!

COMMENTS

These last verses possibly have an ancient literary function of an [epilogue](#), although this is debated. The opening sentence seems to point in the direction of a closing out of the essay: Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα.... Note the similarity to the final statement of the Pro-

logue (1:4): καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα.... But in 2:4 is ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα.... And then somewhat similar is 2:26, Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ.... John makes considerable use of the phrase ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, I am writing to you...., which makes use of the epistolary aorist tense function.⁵ Sometimes John used the present tense, γράφομεν / γράφω, 1:4; 2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13 (2x), but at other times the epistolary aorist, 2:14 (3x); 2:21, 26, 5:13. The use of γράφω with the demonstrative pronoun ταῦτα surfaces in 1:4; 2:1; 2:26; 5:13. The plural demonstrative ταῦτα uniformly refers backward to something stated previously.

The use of the label epilogue for 5:13-21 is over stretching the evidence here considerably. What is more likely is that 5:13-21 is intended to summarize the previous discussion in chapter five. Only the final admonition in 5:21 signals any ending of the essay.

The stated intention for John's writing these words is given as **ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον**, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. *So that you may know that you possess life eternal*. The subjunctive form of the perfect tense εἰδῆτε is unique for First John but grammatically appropriate for the construction. More commonly in expressions of confidence in knowing God John uses γινώσκω (25x) over οἶδα (16x). The use of γινώσκω both picks up on the LXX use of it for the Hebrew **יָדַע** (929x) stressing certainty in knowing, as well as carries a subtle attack on the gnosticizing opponents' use of γνῶσις as the salvational knowledge foundation for their system of belief. But John's extensive use of both γινώσκω and οἶδα with indications of certainty of our κοινωνία with God and Christ signals that not much difference of meaning between these two verbs was intended.

What is to be known with certainty is ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, *that you have life eternal*. The phrases τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον (1:2; 2:25; / ζωὴν...αἰώνιον (3:15; 5:11, 13, 20) / τὴν ζωὴν (3:14; 5:12) / ζωὴν (5:16) with the same meaning of life without any end to it stands as an important theme, again playing off the Prologue mentioning of it. Although referred to several times prior to chapter five, it becomes very prominent in chapter five.

When John adds τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, to those believing in the name of the Son of God, after the reference to eternal life he closely links certainty of knowledge of eternal life to his readers ὑμῖν, *to you*, whom he now identifies as τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ at one place of sentence emphasis in ancient Greek, the

⁵The epistolary aorist was a device in ancient Greek most found in letters and tractates where the writer adopted the future time frame of the reader rather than the present time frame of composition. Thus he would write from the reader's vantage point of this material being composed in the past.

very end of the sentence. Already in 3:23 a similar expression was used: ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *so that we might believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ*. The alternative pattern used in 5:13, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, *to those believing in the name of the Son of God*, has the exact same meaning. Thus John's intention in writing these words about Jesus as the Christ in 5:1-12 has been to promote certainty in his reader's knowing that they have eternal life.

This certainty then encourages confidence in praying as verses 14-15 assert: 14 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. 15 καὶ ἐὰν οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὃ ἐὰν αἰτώμεθα, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. *And this is the confidence which we possess before Him that what ever we ask according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in what ever we ask, we know that we have our requests which we have made of Him.*

Confidence (παρρησία) in prayer was stressed in 3:21-22 earlier.

21 Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδιά [ἡμῶν] μὴ καταγινώσκη, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν 22 καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτώμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν.

21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

In this earlier text such confidence came out of loving our brothers (3:13-18) which provided certainty of being of the Truth (3:19-20). This in turn produced confidence in prayer (3:21-22). In 5:14-15, confidence in prayer comes out of the certainty of possessing eternal life through our faith commitment to the Son of God. Thus we have additional insight into being confident in praying to our God.

The prerequisites to asking God in prayer are set forth first in 3:22 as ὅτι τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν, *because we are keeping His commandments and doing the things pleasing before Him*. And then in 5:13 as αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, *asking according to His will*. These both compliment each other, and give us a fuller picture.

Verse 14 then carries the idea further to new insights: καὶ ἐὰν οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὃ ἐὰν αἰτώμεθα, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, *And if we know that He is hearing us in what ever we may ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him*. Certainty that God hears us produces certainty that our properly made petitions will be granted by God in the framework of His will.

Out of this discussion then John moves to another new point, that of helping a brother. In 3:17, true love doesn't hesitate to share its material possessions with a fellow Christian in physical need.

But in 5:16-17 the focus is on helping a brother in spiritual need: 16 Ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἀμαρτάνοντα ἀμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἀμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἀμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ. 17 πᾶσα ἀδικία ἀμαρτία ἐστίν, καὶ ἔστιν ἀμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον. 16 *If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.*

Here we hit another puzzling text with interpretive uncertainty built into it. Thus a massive amount of interpretive speculation has come about. Most of which is worthless junk!

The framework of any interpretative must be that established by the text itself. Here two limits are put in place: ἀμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, *a sin not leading to death*, and πᾶσα ἀδικία ἀμαρτία ἐστίν, *all wrongdoing is sin*. Critical to proper understanding is the meaning of μὴ πρὸς θάνατον / μὴ πρὸς θάνατον / οὐ πρὸς θάνατον / ἀμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον. John clearly distinguishes between ἀμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον and ἀμαρτία μὴ / οὐ πρὸς θάνατον.

Two questions must be answered in order to gain proper understanding: What is ἀμαρτία here? and What is the idea of death here?⁶

⁶“These points are relevant:

“(a) In Jewish literature the idea of ‘sin leading to death’ is occasionally found (cf. Num 18:22; Deut 22:26; Isa 22:14; Jub. 21:22; 26:34; 33:13, 18; T. Iss. 7:1; Soṭa 48a). But the reference in these cases is to physical death as the consequence of wrongdoing; whereas the present context speaks of spiritual life and death (note the use of ζωή, ‘life,’ in v 16a). Sin resulting in sickness or death is also described elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 5:5; 11:29–30; cf. 1 Tim 1:20; Jas 5:15; Rev 2:23). However, once again the primary allusion is physical; and nothing in this part of 1 John indicates that ‘sin leading to death’ must be understood as sin punished (and thus detected) by fatal bodily illness (so Law, Tests, 139).

“(b) A more likely background to the notion of sin leading, or not leading, to death is to be found in the distinction drawn in the OT and Judaism between inadvertent and deliberate sins. Sacrifice could atone for unconscious sins; but conscious sins could only be removed by the death of the sinner (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:15, 17–18; Num 15:27–31; Deut 17:12; Ps 19:13; cf. 1QS 5:11–12; 8:21–9:2; CD 3:14–15). It is possible that John’s categorization of ‘sin not leading to death’ rests on the Jewish understanding of sins which could be forgiven, and that his description of ‘sin leading to death’ depends on the idea in Judaism that certain sins could only result in death. The likelihood that the fundamental ethos of the Johannine circle was Jewish-Christian strengthens this possibility.

First, what does John mean by ἀμαρτία? The ini-

“If so, to what kinds of sin is John referring in each case? It is unlikely that he is concerned with specific sins (the word ἀμαρτία, ‘sin,’ is used without a definite article throughout vv 16–17); he is dealing rather with ‘sin’ in general, and in its broad expressions (cf. 1:8; and the comment on 1:7). Our translation, ‘mortal sin’ (and its opposite), is therefore strictly anachronistic. The classification of sins as ‘mortal’ (deadly) and ‘venial’ (non-deadly) was introduced into moral theology much later than the first Christian century (cf. Stott, 187–88).

“On the basis of the teaching in 1 John itself, then, we may argue (against Bultmann, 87, who claims that definition is impossible in view of John’s imprecise language) that ‘sin leading to death’ alludes to such wrongdoing as is incompatible with walking in the light and living as a child of God. Against such behavior John has been warning his readers throughout this letter, by showing them the conditions for a truly Christian existence: renunciation of sin, obedience to the love command, rejection of worldliness, and maintenance of the faith. A deliberate refusal to fulfill those conditions leads to the very opposite of light and life; it must end in darkness and death. Those who choose such a path are committing an unpardonable sin (cf. Mark 3:28–29 = Matt 12:31–32 = Luke 12:10); and by their basic denial of Jesus, and their lack of love, they are risking God’s denial of them (2:22–23; 3:10–15; cf. Mark 8:38 par.). Deliberate sin of this kind leads inevitably to apostasy, a removal from the Church which is evidence of the presence and spirit of antichrist (cf. 2:18–19; 4:2–5).

“Sin which does not lead to death, on the other hand, is still possible for believers. They may genuinely have faith in God through Christ, and seek to love their fellow men and women; but they may also find that on occasions the battle is too strong, and that they yield to temptation. Such error is not a deliberate turning away from God, but the kind of inadvertent wrongdoing to which John refers elsewhere in his letter, and for which God’s grace has made provision (2:1–2; 4:10). For this general exegetical stance see Brooke, 146–47; Marshall, 247–48; cf. also Nauck, Tradition, 133–46, especially 141–46.

“(c) Even so, certain questions remain. First, what is the point of asking for a ‘brother’ to be granted the gift of ‘life,’ if the sin he commits ‘does not lead to death’? In answer it may be said that ‘sin remains sin’ (Marshall, 248; and see v 17), and that (despite 3:4–10) a settled policy of wrongdoing can lead to apostasy; hence the warning in v 21. See the comment on 2:19; note also the prayer of Jesus for Peter, when he began to deny his Lord (Luke 22:32; cf. John 21:15–17).

“Second, what is the reason for not interceding in the case of someone whose sin does ‘lead to death’? Prayer for those whose lives are marked by false faith, disobedience to God’s commands and a lack of love, may indeed seem a pointless exercise. However, the possibility of ultimate repentance and recovery from the most determined denial of that which is right, and practice of that which is wrong (even when excommunication is involved), can never be ruled out completely (cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). In this connection Dodd (137) quotes Mark 10:27 (‘all things are possible with God’); cf. also Matt 18:12–14.

“(d) A final question concerns the standing of those who can commit ‘a sin which leads to death.’ Some commentators assume that believers are not capable of ‘mortal sin,’ and argue therefore that John is here describing solely its practice by non-Christians.

tial answer seems to be in πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, **every wrongdoing is sin**. Since the Roman Catholic introduction a few centuries later of the distinction between mortal (deadly) and venial (non-deadly) sins into their system of teachings interpretation of 5:16-17 has centered on identifying the proper category for a wide range of specific sinful actions. Protestant interpretive history has been sucked into this way of thinking as well.

But one must come back to literary context as critical for proper understanding. The word ἁμαρτία shows up 17 times in First John, along with the verb ἁμαρτάνω 10 times.⁷ The noun ἁμαρτία is

in the singular

- 1:7 ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας, **every sin / all sin**
- 1:8 ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, **sin we don't have**
- 3:4 Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, **everyone committing sin**
- 3:8 ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, **the one committing sin is of the devil**
- 3:9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, **everyone born of God does not commit sin**
- 5:16 τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν

Stott (189–90), for example, maintains that neither type of sinner in this context is to be regarded as a child of God, since John is speaking either of nominal Christians or of hardened unbelievers (see the comment on ἀδελφός, ‘brother,’ below).

However, the problem of postbaptismal sin was one which apparently needed to be faced in the early Church; and such texts as Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–31 (cf. 12:16–17); Herm. Sim. 6:1–4, indicate that the fact of believers falling away entirely from the faith was not unknown. Similarly, John’s warning against sin, and the failure to maintain orthodox faith (2:24; 2 John 8–9), shows that while he expected his readers to walk in the light as sons of God (1:7; vv 18–19), he did not ignore the possibility that some believing but heretically inclined members of his community might become apostate. See also comment (c) above. We conclude that John attributes the possibility of ‘sin which does not lead to death’ to believers, but ‘mortal sin’ to unbelievers who are, or believers who have become, antichristian (cf. Bultmann, 86–87).

“Two footnotes remain. First, although there has been much scholarly discussion about the precise significance of the phrase ‘a sin which leads to death,’ John’s introduction of this category in the present context is almost parenthetical. The more important thought is that of ‘sin which does not lead to death,’ and the possibility of God’s ‘life’ being given to such a sinner in answer to prayer. cf. Law, Tests, 141–42.

“Second, we all stand in need of forgiveness, and in this matter the grace of God is all (cf. 1:5–2:2). John deliberately does not categorize in detail the sins (or sinners) he mentions; rather, he teaches complete dependence by God’s children on the will and judgment of their Father in heaven (cf. Maurice, 295–96).”

[Stephen S. Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 297–299.]

⁷ ἁμαρτία: 1:7, 8, 9; 2:2, 12; 3:4, 5, 8, 9; 4:10; 5:16, 17. ἁμαρτάνω: 1:10; 2:1; 3:6, 8, 9; 5:16, 18.

μηὲς πρὸς θάνατον, **his brother sinning a sin not to death**

5:16 ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον, **there is sin not to death**

5:17 πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, **every wrongdoing is sin**

but in the plural

1:9 ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, **we confess our sins**

1:9 ἀφ᾽ ἧ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας, **He forgives our sins**

2:2, ἰλασμός ἐστίν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, **sin offering for our sins**

2:12 ἀφέονται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, **your sins are forgiven**

3:5 τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρη, **He takes away sins**

4:10 τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, **His son as sin offering for our sins**

What can we make of John’s use of the noun ἁμαρτία?

First, in regard to the plural usage the dominate context of usage refers to individual actions defined as expressions of sin as a spiritual principle. These texts overwhelmingly refer to Christians committing isolated sinful actions and the need to seek forgiveness (1:9) which is assured to the believer. Remember this is the positive scenario surrounded by two negative scenarios. This seems to be the point of 5:16 where a Christian sees a brother committing one of these kinds of sins that John here defines as

ἁμαρτίαν μηὲς πρὸς θάνατον, a sin not leading to death.

Second, in regard to the singular usage of ἁμαρτία, the situation is a bit more involved. In the 1:8-10 pericope the two negative scenarios in 1:8 and 1:10 describe an individual claiming ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν that he has not committed sin (v. 8) and οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, that he has committed no sin that has consequence (v. 10). Such claims put the individual outside the children of God and into a false non saved Christian.

In the second passage of 3:4-10 the singular usage of ἁμαρτία points to sin as a spiritual dynamic rather than an individual action. Notice the definite article τὴν before ἁμαρτίαν in 3:4, 8, 9, which signals the principle rather a specific action. Such is τὴν ἀνομίαν, **lawlessness** (3:4); the person doing this ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, **is of the devil** (3:8); but the one not committing sin ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, **is born of God**.

Add to this the target of most all of the negative scenarios in First John being the false teachers in Asia influencing the churches. Their gnosticizing tendencies led them to a totally false definition of ἁμαρτία as **ignorance**.⁸ What John seems to be pointing to in 5:16-17

⁸In this Greek tradition the plural ἁμαρτίας is understood as expressions of ignorance that stupid people make because they are not intelligent. For the Gnostics the plural ἁμαρτίας represent

with the statement ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον is the completely false conceptualization of sin as ignorance by these false teachers. Elsewhere he has already asserting that individuals continuing to live by this definition are of the devil and have no κοινωνία with either the Father and certainly with the incarnate Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God whom they deny.

Thus if we resist being trapped in thinking individual acts of sin for the singular form of ἁμαρτία, and see 5:16-17 as John's call to help the authentic believer find the solution of confession (1:9) that produces forgiveness through Jesus as παράκλητον, *advocate*, and ἱλασμός, *sin offering* (2:1-2), for all such individual sinful actions, then the brother's committing ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, *sin that doesn't lead to death*, makes clear sense. He needs to understand what he is doing in light of John's early discussions in 1:8-10, 2:1-2, and 3:4-10. The mature Christian needs to help such a brother. His first obligation is prayer: αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, *he should ask and He will give him life*. John has just finished talking about the potency of authentic praying and this is a crucially important place to put prayer into action. John makes it clear that concentrating on a wayward Christian brother than on the false teachers is his point here: ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ, *there is sin leading to death; I'm not speaking about that so that he should ask*.

In verses 18-20 John continues expanding on the idea of sinning by a believer. First comes a strong declaration already made previously: Οἶδαμεν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, ἀλλ' ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ. *We know that everyone born of God does not continue sinning, but the One born of God keeps him and the evil one cannot touch Him*. Here John brings together the earlier expressed idea (3:4-10) that the authentic believer cannot continue living sinfully after conversion with the role of Christ in regard to sin (1:9; 2:1-2; 3:4-10). The true believer is γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, *born of God*, and consequently does continue living sinfully.

Then in a playful use of terms, very clear in the Greek but usually muddy in English translation, The one born of God (γεγεννημένος, perfect tense of γεννάω) is protected by the One born of God (γεννηθεὶς, aorist tense of γεννάω). Not only is Christ our ἱλασμός (2:1; 4:10) for our sins, He also is our παράκλητον, *Advocate* (2:2), which John now expands to mean our Protector: ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν, *the One born of God protects His own people*. And this means that the devil cannot get at Christ in order to harm Christ's people. In 2:13-14 John speaks of believers having already

not-Gnostic understanding of their version of the gospel, because such people do not possess the saving γνώσις that has purified their souls and that gives them superior insight in the spirit world around and above them.

overcome (νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρὸν) the evil one. The perfect verb form νενικήκατε points to conversion as the moment of victory achieved. Thus in 5:18 John declares that the devil, in defeat by Christ, has no more ability to get at Him (ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ). By not being able to undermine Christ the devil has no ability to harm Christ's own people (ἑαυτὸν).

This reality then leads John to the declarations in vv. 19-20:

οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται. *We know that we are of God and that the entire world is in the grip of the evil one.*

οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει καὶ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. *And we know that the Son of God is here and has given us understanding so that we can know the Truth, and we are in the Truth, in His Son Jesus Christ.*

These are powerful assertions of certainty adding to the list of previously declared certainty. 2:3, 4, 13, 18; 3:1, 16, 19; 20; 24; 4:2, 6, 7, 8, 13; 5:2, 20 (w. γινώσκω), and 2:11, 20, 21, 29; 3:2, 5, 14, 15; 5:13, 15, 18, 19, 20 (w. οἶδα).

First we know that ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν, *we are of God*. John affirms again the confidence that God is our Father to his readers. **Second**, he asserts, for the first time, ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *the entire world is placed in the devil's hands*. This has significant implications for those, even those claiming to be Christian, who are in the grip of worldliness (2:15-17; 3:1, 13; 4:1-9). Earlier John in 4:4 indicated that the devil himself was ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, *in the world*.

Third, we know that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει, *the Son of God is here*. The consistent linking of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ with Jesus as the incarnate Christ in numerous previous statements makes it very clear whom he is talking about here. The verb ἦκει carries in it the meaning of both has arrived and thus is present. The powerful stress on this came initially in the Prologue (1:1-3), and now is being reaffirmed with different terms.

Fourth, we also know then that δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. *He has given us understanding so that we know the Truth, and we exist in the Truth, that is, in His Son Jesus Christ*. Christ has brought the believers διάνοιαν rather than the γνώσις claimed by the false teachers. διάνοια stresses thorough comprehension. The intention of this διάνοια is ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, *so that we would know the Truth*. John now defines ἀληθινόν as God Himself and asserts that our existence as authentic believers is in God who is the Truth itself. How does this character of God concretize itself into recognizable expression? John asserts that the Truth is nothing less than ἐν τῷ

υἱὸς αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. [His Son Jesus Christ](#). Clearly a condemnation of the false teachers, this assertion claims that God as Truth can be understood on in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the incarnate Jesus who is the very Son of God. Here these false teachers severely disagreed with John, but in this statement John comes back to the major points of the Prologue in 1:1-4.

The addendum statement, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος, [this one is the true God and life eternal](#), further drives home John's point about who Christ actually is, in contradiction to the false teachings of these gnosticizers.

Although John's final declaration in v. 21, Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων, [Little children, guard yourselves against idols](#), has occasioned all kinds of puzzled interpretations, in the context it makes clear sense. Every day in the Christian communities of Asia the believers would walk past pagan temples with immoral practices taking place. They would work along side individuals who frequented these temples and participated openly in the immoral behavior. The gnosticizing teachers were putting forth a version of Christian that would enable Christians to accommodate themselves to this dominantly pagan lifestyle. John's parting word to his readers was a reminder that every time they passed one of these temples they should be reminded that God has nothing to do with that place and thoroughly condemns the activities taking place in it. Contrary to the compromising teaching of the false teachers, the people of God are to not participate in nor engage in these activities.

CONCLUSION

This is First John! Simple and yet profound at the same time. Not a letter in the real sense of ancient letters, but instead an ancient tractate with contours of letter forms on the fringe. At that point very much within the tradition of Greco-Roman philosophical writings.

But when one 'opens the hood' and begins to examine the details some very different emerges. A very Jewish mind is pulling ideas together in defense of the apostolic Gospel against corrupting influences of teachers among the churches who had adopted Greek ways of thinking and Greek religious ideas. They were attempting to layer all this over the Gospel in producing an alternative version that was much more accommodating to the surrounding pagan culture and its ways of behaving itself. Although their precise identity remains something of a mystery, the general contours of their opposition to the apostle Gospel give off numerous signals of having adopted early stages of a Greek way of religious thinking that was making some inroads into Christian circles in the Roman province of Asia. Paul had encountered similar patterns at Colossae over

four decades earlier. Now the aged apostle John writing from Ephesus toward the end of the first century was having to deal with it on a more wide spread basis. It would take several more decades until well into the second century for all of this to gel into well refined theological systems with teachers such as [Valentinus](#) who started out in Alexandria (136 AD) and ended up in Rome toward the 150s. Perhaps more significant was [Cerinthus](#), a Gnostic teacher at the very beginning of the second century in Asia. From the limited data about him, he brought together both Jewish and Greek religious ideas into a unified system that ran counter to the apostolic Gospel. Some of the later church fathers believed him to be an adversary of the apostle John directly in Asia.

John's strategy in defending the apostolic Gospel among the churches in Asia is fascinating for several reasons. For one thing it does not use reasoning patterns common in the post Enlightenment western culture. Evidence of this can be seen clearly in the highly artificial outlines imposed on First John by many modern commentators. The outlines are developed, super imposed over the text, and then promptly forgotten by those commentators who seek to take the text seriously.

More intriguing to me in my study of First John is to see parallel writing strategy between the fourth gospel and First John. Both begin with a formal Prologue (1:1-18 / 1:1-4). In the Prologue the critical motifs of images / religious ideas are laid on the table. Then the remainder of each document seeks to unpack these foundational ideas with expansions and perceived implications. The fourth gospel does this in modified ancient βίος format around the life and ministry of Jesus as the Word. First John, on the other hand, simply begins putting expansion elements on the table of the Prologue concepts. In chapters one through three numerous new implications from the Prologue are introduced, but in chapters four and five John concentrates more on repeating these earlier implications in order to extend them further. He also does a lot of linking these earlier extensions together in order to generate new implications. Interestingly, when he repeats an earlier motif he always adds something new to it; he never just repeats it and leaves it the same.

In presenting the material John employs a substantial range of Greek grammar patterns but often adds his own distinctive touch to them. Among the more common is the use of fictional scenarios either in the first plural or more often in the third singular forms to introduce extensions to the core ideas of the Prologue. Thus extensive use of the Greek third class conditional protasis (ἐάν + the subjunctive mood verb) surfaces but

more so in the early parts of the essay. By chapter two he begins gravitating toward the substantival participle phrase for setting up his scenarios. These scenarios come in two varieties often in a chain of possible situations. There will be the heroic positive situation reflecting authentic Christianity and then the negative situation reflecting the heresy advocated by his opponents. This becomes a major vehicle for getting his teachings on the table before his readers.

Another very common grammar form is his typically distinctive use of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος in the feminine and neuter singular spellings. Generally in Greek as well as in most modern western languages when the writer says 'this' it refers backward to something already said. But John mostly and only with very few exceptions uses "this" at the front of the sentence to refer to something at the end of the sentence. Most common is ἐν τούτῳ, *by this*, as a signal of the foundational principle underpinning the main clause idea. Occasionally like in 1:5, the feminine form αὕτη, this, will be used because it is linked to a feminine noun but the pronoun refers to a ὅτι clause at the end of the sentence.

Additionally other lessor significant Johannine touches on writing strategy will surface. All of these serve to create a very distinctive document inside the New Testament. Second and Third John reflect virtually none of these writing patterns, and are much more conventionally written in Greek, especially the ancient Greek letter form.

The critical foundation in the Prologue puts about four central ideas on the table as basic defenses of the apostolic Gospel for John to use in elaboration through the remainder of the document. These are Jesus Christ as the incarnate life giving Logos, the κοινωμία with both God and the Son that becomes possible from Jesus Christ as the Logos, the exclusive nature of this apostolic Gospel message as the only way for sinful humanity to establish κοινωμία with God, and the critical role of the churches retaining their apostolic roots despite the pressures of these false teachers in their midst.

From 1:5 through 5:21 unpacks these central ideas for his readers constantly contrasting their implications for those in the apostolic Gospel and the disastrous consequences for those rejecting the apostolic Gospel. John completely rejects the authenticity of the claims of the false teachers to being Christian and signals that they are of the devil and completely sold out to worldliness. Both their wrong headed thinking and the obviously sinful behavior betray their true nature as having no κοινωμία with God whatsoever.

But the attack aspect of this essay is secondary to the primary focus on implications on how to live out

one's faith commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This has to do with dealing with occasional sins as a believer, how to properly love one's fellow believer in the Christian community, and grasping both the profundity of God and His love for His people as well as the relationship of Jesus to God and the connection of the Holy Spirit to them as well.

Knowing, loving, obeying are among the major themes in the document.⁹ John weaves these together somewhat like four grapevines growing out of a common stump and shooting upwards around each other in complementing each and occasionally linking up branches to one another. These themes come to the surface then recede into the background and then re-appear over and over throughout the essay. And all of them find their rootage in the 'stump' of the Prologue which provides legitimization.

When you read First John with this understanding some wonderful will happen. Although on the surface everything seems disjointed and random, this reading pattern will expose many unexpected nuances of meaning and implication to the four core ideas in the Prologue. By the end of the text you will possess brand new insights into how the Christian life is set up and how God intends for it to function.

⁹As an experiment, I encourage you to probe First John by using an online Bible concordance such as [Bible Study Tools](#) or [Bible Gateway](#). First set up the translation in your preferred language. A more form oriented translation will probably work better such as NAB in English or BdA in Spanish. Set it to search only First John. Then type in key terms such as 'know*' with the * attached to be sure it picks up all the forms from this stem. Read through the resulting listing reflecting on the strategy used by John of building off the core concepts of the Prologue through expansions, implications, connections etc. By doing this you will begin to discover first hand how John develops his ideas.