

Introduction to 1 John

Introductory Matters

The apostle John ministered in Asia Minor, in and around the city of Ephesus. Under the ministry of Paul and others, many in this region had believed, and worshipped together as brothers and sisters. And then, something very sad happened.

1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 19 **They went out from us, but they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

If you've been through such an experience, you know how unsettling it can be to those who remain. We inevitably ask, "Did we do something wrong? Our friends believed in the Lord Jesus, along with us. How could this happen? Were we at fault?"

The Lord Jesus anticipated such events, in his parable of the four soils.

Luk 8:13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which **for a while believe**, and in time of temptation **fall away**.

Unfortunately, not all faith is saving faith. James warned his readers,

Jas 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? **can [the] faith (that kind of faith) save him?** ... 17 Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead**, being alone. ... 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead?**

John wrote this epistle to reassure those who remain that they are indeed the Lord's.

1Jn 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

This book is written for believers who have doubts about whether their faith is real. It gives a series of tests that will show whether faith has indeed produced life. If you've ever had doubts about your spiritual condition, or if you want to be an encouragement to younger believers with such doubts, this book will be a great help to you.

1 John seems to wander from one thought to another, and for years I couldn't get its structure straight in my mind. Recently, I found an analysis that seems to me clear and compelling,¹ encouraging me to work through the book with you.

Before going verse by verse, let's compare the book with John's gospel, and focus on its purpose.

1 Robert Law, *The Tests of Life*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909.
https://biblicalelearning.org/New_Testament_Greek/Text/Law-TestsOfLife/Law-TestsOfLife.pdf,
<https://a.co/d/hPKfVEo>

I would prefer the expression "signs of life," to avoid the implication that John's purpose is to raise doubts.

Parallels with John

The start and end of the book both show striking similarities to the Gospel of John (Table 1, chart). These parallels focus our attention on the *subject* and *purpose* of each book.

| | Gospel of John | 1 John |
|---------|--|---|
| Subject | Jhn 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life ; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness ; and the darkness comprehended it not . | 1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning , which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ; 2 (For the life was manifested , and we have seen it, and bear witness , and shew unto you that eternal life , which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, |
| Purpose | Jhn 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name . | 1Jn 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life , and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. |

Table 1: Parallels between John's Gospel and his First Epistle

Each book begins with similar verses stating its *subject*. Both take us back to “the beginning,” describe God’s revelation by a “Word,” concerning “life.” But there is an important difference. John’s gospel is about “**him**,” the human-divine *person* of the Lord Jesus Christ, and more than the other three emphasizes his deity. But the epistle is about “**that**,” the *life* that the Lord Jesus lived with his Father. The gospel is a detailed *statue* of the Lord Jesus, but the epistle analyzes the spiritual *life* he lived with the Father during his earthly sojourn, and teaches us how we can live such a life.

Both John and 1 John state their main *purposes*, near the end. The gospel is written to provide the evidence that we need to *believe* that Jesus is the Son of God, so that we can be saved by faith. The epistle is written to those who have already believed in the Lord Jesus, to tell them how they can *know* that they do indeed have the life promised in the Gospel.

John’s purpose is positive: “that ye might know that **ye** have eternal life.” He is not writing “that ye might know that **they** do not have eternal life.” The tests work both ways, but the main focus is on encouraging believers, more than condemning the apostates.

This order is probably chronological. First, John recorded his portrait of the Lord and his life among men, inviting people to believe. Later, his pastoral work made clear that some professors were not possessors, that some who believed were not truly born again. The apostasy that he would later describe in the Revelation was already starting to work, leading to a split (2:18-19). John wrote his epistle to encourage those who remain that their faith is real.

Unpacking the Purpose of 5:13

Signs of Life

How can we distinguish true, living faith from the dead faith of James 2:17? That is the purpose that 5:13 sets forth. Consistent with this purpose, 1 John abounds in statements about knowing that we have eternal life, what Law calls “tests of life,” and that we will call “signs of life” (chart). Here are some of them:

2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, **if we keep his commandments**.

2:29 ye know that **every one that doeth righteousness** is born of him.

3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, **because we love the brethren**.

3:18 My little children, **let us not love** in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. 19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall **assure our hearts** before him.

4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because **he hath given us of his Spirit**. ... 15 **Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God**, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

5:1 Whosoever **believeth that Jesus is the Christ** is born of God:

These signs fall into three categories:

1. **Righteousness**, obedience to God's law
2. **Love** toward God's people
3. **Belief** that the Lord Jesus is both God and man.

How the Book is Organized

These three signs are developed in spiral fashion (Table 2).² The third spiral does not consider them separately, but integrates them, first showing how love and belief are related, then working in righteousness.

Since the book's purpose is "that you might know," we expect to read a lot about knowing. Figure 1 (chart) shows where verbs for "know" appear in the book. The vertical dotted lines show the columns of Table 2. Note three features.

1. Verbs for knowing peak at the start of each of the three sections, offering some confirmation of the threefold analysis in Table 2.
2. No verbs for knowing appear in 1:1-2:2.
3. There is a gap from 5:2 to 5:13, and then another peak, suggesting a separate section.

While verbs for knowing do not appear in 1:1-2:2, there is a verb that does appear there, and that is missing later in the book: *κοινωνία koinōnia* G2842, "fellowship" (Figure 2), in particular, fellowship between us and God. That fellowship is directly related to eternal life, through a central definition from John 17:

Jhn 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

2 Law starts the "righteousness" section at 1:5.

| | Righteousness | Love | Belief |
|----------|---|-----------|-----------|
| 2:3-28 | 2:3-6 | 2:7-17 | 2:18-28 |
| 2:29-4:6 | 2:29-3:10a | 3:10b-24a | 3:24b-4:6 |
| 4:7-5:12 | 4:7-5:1 Love and Belief; 5:2-5 Love, Righteousness, and Belief 5:6-12, Witnesses to Love, Righteousness, and Belief | | |

Table 2: The three signs of eternal life

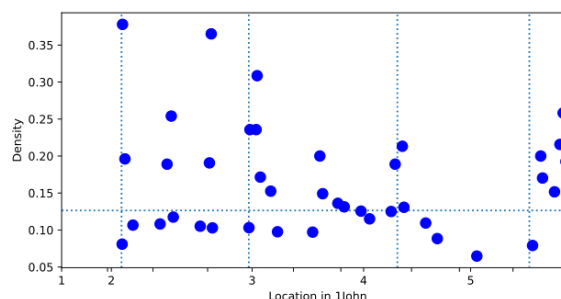


Figure 1: Verbs for "know" in 1 John.

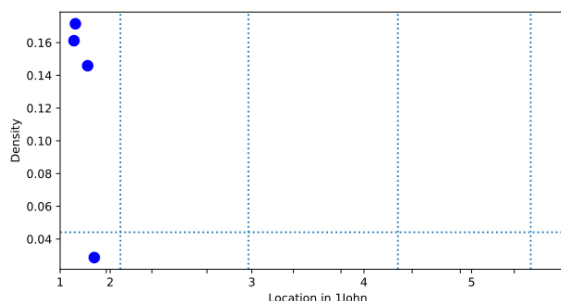


Figure 2: "Fellowship" in 1 John

Eternal life consists in knowing God, that is, in having fellowship with him. And 1:5-2:2 develops in great detail the hindrances to fellowship, and how we can deal with them.

This “fellowship” section shares with the “know” section a clear statement of purpose:³

1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, **that ye also may have fellowship with us**: and truly **our fellowship is with the Father**, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things write we unto you, **that your joy may be full**.

2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, **that ye sin not**. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

The first section appears to be a motivating introduction to the second.

- The desired goal is fellowship with God in the first section, and eternal life in the second.
- The first section deals with sin in general. The second section develops three signs.

Subject to revision, we suggest the overall structure in Figure 3 (chart). The book begins and ends with motivating summaries. The main body has three cycles. The first two deal sequentially with righteousness, love, and belief, while the third shows their integration.

How to Use the Signs

The faith that gives eternal life has certain indications: righteous living, love for the brethren, and belief in the person of the Lord Jesus as both God and man. These tests can give false negatives. Even true believers sometimes stumble into sin, become impatient with one another, or have doubts about the mysteries of the incarnation. Does this mean that we’re not truly born again?

Remember that John wrote the book “that ye might know,” not “that ye might doubt.” (This is why I prefer to speak of “signs of life” rather than “tests of life.”) We should look at our shortcomings from three perspectives—spiritual, chronological, and social (chart).

Spiritually, if you sin and it bothers you, that itself is a sign that the Holy Spirit dwells in you and is making you sensitive to sin. Paul in Romans 7 describes the frustration of a believer struggling with sin, but then discloses the answer in Romans 8:

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who **walk** not after the flesh, but **after the Spirit**.

We walk “after the flesh” when we follow its urgings. So also, the Spirit of God urges us away from sin and toward godly conduct. This may be in mind in Ephesians 4,

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And **grieve not the holy Spirit of God**, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

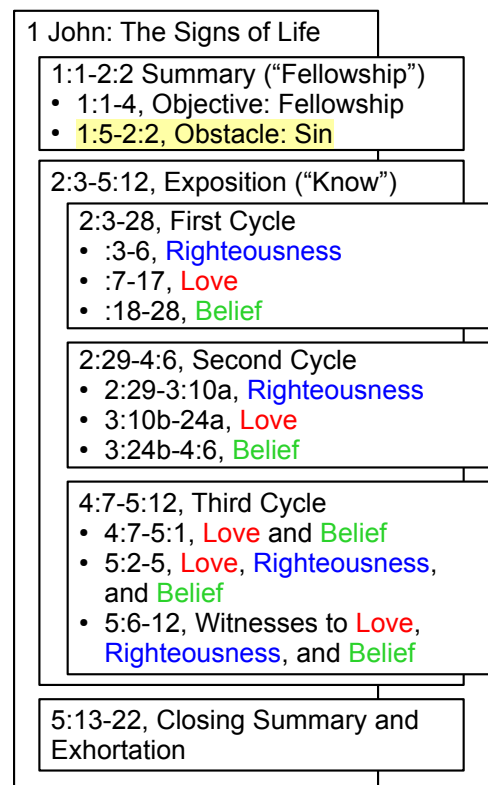


Figure 3: Tentative Outline of 1 John

³ 1:4; 2:1; and 5:13 are the only instances of γράφω ...ἵνα in the book

1 John Introduction and Chapter 1

If your sin bothers you, praise God! The unbeliever's conscience is seared (1 Tim 4:2), making it insensitive to sin. The Spirit of Christ will call sin to the attention of God's children.

Chronologically, recognize that conquering sin is a matter of spiritual growth. Paul described the Corinthians,

1Co 3:1 And I, **brethren**, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

He calls them "brethren," but rebukes them for "walk[ing] as men," because they are babes in Christ. In examining your own life, look at how it has changed since you received the Lord. None of us is perfect now, but how are we compared with a year ago? With ten years ago? If you are the Lord's, there will be changes. Some sins that posed great temptations a year ago, you now handle with no problem. Don't expect a baby Christian to live like a mature one.

The *social* perspective is perhaps the most important. We are not intended to live the Christian life alone. We need the encouragement of other believers, and the institution that God has ordained to provide this support is the local church. This epistle closes with an exhortation to pursue this corporate function:

1Jn 5:16 If any man **see his brother** sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

Paul exhorts the Galatians,

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, **ye which are spiritual, restore such an one** in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we are to examine not only ourselves individually, but also the body of which we are a part:

1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man **examine himself**, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not **discerning the Lord's body**.

If you are struggling with sin, ask a more mature brother or sister to share your struggle. They can help you be sure that you are truly saved, and then coach you in godliness, to overcome the temptation that the Spirit has revealed to you and lead you the next step in your pilgrimage.

1:1-2:2, Fellowship with God

Based on the purpose statement in 5:13, 1 John tells how I can know that I have eternal life. Why should I want to live forever? What would that life be like?

The Lord Jesus taught that eternal life is knowing God, having fellowship with him.

Jhn 17:3 And **this is life eternal**, that **they might know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

The book starts by focusing our attention on this objective. It establishes the basic principle that sin breaks this fellowship, and outlines the ways God has provided to deal with this sin.

This introductory section guards against a negative application of the book. John's purpose is "that ye might know," not "that ye might doubt." As he goes through the three signs, his readers may be overwhelmed to contemplate how far short they fall. This opening chapter acknowledges that our lives to validate our confession, but it also diagnoses ways we might fail, and tells us how our shortcomings can be overcome.

1:1-4, Announcement of the Subject

As we have noticed, these verses invite close comparison with John 1:1-5. We can identify no fewer than six points of similarity or contrast (Table 3). We'll highlight these as we work through these verses.

1:1 That—The subject is not "he," but "that." The focus is not on the person (as in the gospel), but on something about him, the life that he lived with the Father.

which was from the beginning,—That shared life existed "from the beginning," long before the Son of God came into the world. Like the gospel, the epistle teaches that the one John knew as Jesus existed long before the birth of the baby in Bethlehem.

which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled,—The writer claims to be an eyewitness, a claim satisfied by the apostle John. Every organ that God gave him—ears, eyes, hands, and in 1:2, 3, the mouth—is focused on the Lord Jesus.

John's example warns us where to focus our attention. Eight centuries before, Isaiah warned about abusing the ears, eyes, hands, and mouth. He described the righteous person (chart),

Isa 33:15 He that walketh righteously, and **speake**th uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his **hands** from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his **ears** from hearing of blood, and shutteth his **eyes** from seeing evil;

Isaiah's maxim later⁴ appears in oriental thought, most famously in the idiom of the three wise monkeys (Figure 4), "hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil." Believers must be careful where they direct their attention. In our modern society, online media can easily seduce our attention and focus it on unprofitable and harmful themes.

of the Word of life;—But unlike the nirvana of Oriental religion, John's objective is not to empty our minds. He gives us the positive side of this insight: he has focused his attention on "the Word of life." In the light of the parallel with the gospel's description of the Lord Jesus as "the Word," and the statement that John has heard, seen, and handled this "Word," the reference here is to the Lord Jesus, who embodied and revealed the eternal life that John is describing. As

| 1 John 1:1-2 | John 1:1-5 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| :1 that which (the life) | :3, 4 him (the Person) |
| :1 from the beginning | :1, 2 in the beginning |
| :1 the Word (of life) | :1 the Word |
| :1, 2 that eternal life | :4 in him was life |
| :2 life manifested (2x) | :4-5 life is light that shines |
| :2 we have seen and bear witness | :5 darkness does not comprehend |

Table 3: Comparing and *contrasting* the prologues of 1 John and John

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_wise_monkeys traces it to third century BC Chinese wisdom, still later than Isaiah, about 700 BC. (The three monkeys omit the hands, which would be "do no evil.")

believers, we should practice this twofold discipline:

- like the wise monkeys, divert our attention from that which is evil;
- like John, focus our attention and our speech on the Lord Jesus Christ.



Figure 4: The three wise monkeys at the Tōshō-gū shrine in Nikkō, Japan. By Jpatokal - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=148219054>

John's words "heard, seen, looked upon, handled" emphasize that the divine Word appeared physically and tangibly. This emphasis anticipates the core doctrine on which he insists, and that the antichrists had rejected:

1Jn 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

Some heretics in the first two centuries (the docetists, described by Ignatius before his martyrdom in AD 107) taught that Jesus Christ was not physical, but a phantom. His death was only an appearance. Others (described by Irenaeus a little later) taught that Jesus was a real man, but distinct from the Christ, who was only spirit. Both errors divorce the material world, which is fallen, corrupt, and sinful, from the spiritual world, either by denying that Jesus Christ was truly physical, or distinguishing the corruptible man Jesus from the pure and divine Christ. John's assertion corrects both of these errors. He had handled (physically) the divine Word of Life. He had reclined on his breast at the last supper (John 13:25).

We will see other references to this error throughout the book. Later in the second century, such teachings developed into forms of what we now call gnosticism, a name that comes from the Greek γνῶσις "knowledge." This movement taught that matter is evil, spirit is good, and salvation comes through possessing secret knowledge of God, not through any events in the material world. John reminds us that eternal life (a spiritual reality) has tangible, physical consequences. The world is fallen, but Jesus Christ, who is fully both God and man, both flesh and spirit, has come to redeem it, and us who live in it. John knows this, because he has heard, seen, and touched (physical) the word of life (spiritual).

2 (For the life was manifested,—The gospel said,

John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And **the light shineth in darkness**

In the gospel, the life of Christ shone as light into our dark world. Here we read a simpler form of the same thing, "the life was manifested." Our Lord is called "the Word," because he reveals the Father to us.

This verb φανερώ *faneroō* G5319 appears more densely in 1 John (4.2/1000) than in any other NT book, almost always referring to the Lord Jesus and his life (see note). As we will see, he has been manifested so that we could imitate him.

and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life,—The last point of comparison is an important contrast. The gospel emphasizes the rejection of the Lord by his own people, who remained in darkness:

Jhn 1:11 He came unto his own, and **his own received him not.**

But here John joyfully reports, "we have seen it."

which was with the Father;—Now John defines the life that is the subject of the verses. It is the life that the Word of God lived with the Father.

Recall Dame Wisdom's description of her relation to the Lord in Proverbs 8 (chart):

Pro 8:22 The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. 23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. 24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: 26 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. 27 When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: 28 When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: 29 When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: **30 Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;** 31 Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.

The language here is highly poetical, but clearly depicts someone who was present with the Lord before the world was, “in the beginning.” Our Lord is the Word of God, the very expression of the Father's wisdom. His fellowship with the Father is something that has always existed, even before creation.

1 John 4:8, 16 show the significance of this: “God is love.” Love is an essential attribute of God, so it must always have existed. How could he be loving before he created anything to love? Again, consider his covenant faithfulness:

Psa 103:17 But the mercy רַחֲמֵי of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

He is eternally faithful. To whom was he faithful before he created angels or people?

The answer lies in the eternal relation among the Father, Son, and Spirit. Throughout eternity, they have been living in loving, faithful relation with one another. When the Son came into the world, he continued this loving life with the Father, frequently withdrawing for times of prayer and fellowship with him, and shaping his conduct in a way consistent with that joint life. The disciples were privileged to observe a man engaged in living with the Father, and the principles that John outlines in this book show us what such a life looks like.

and was manifested unto us;)—Again, we are reminded that this life between the Father and the Son does not remain hidden in heaven, but has been revealed to us.

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you,—This clause basically repeats 1:2. John and the other disciples were eyewitnesses to that life, and now he is describing it to his readers. He will now give two purposes for describing this life that he had observed personally.

that ye also may have fellowship with us:—The first purpose is that John and his readers may enjoy close fellowship with one another. In the light of the painful split recorded in 2:19, the burden of John's heart is a close unity among the believers.

This verse is puzzling. How does learning about the Son's life with the Father bring believers closer together? The next clause explains how this works.

and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.—The answer is that the fellowship on which we should focus is our fellowship with the Father, as we follow our Lord's example. If we focus on fellowship with each other, we will splinter into separate groups,

each with subtle distinctions that grow into impenetrable walls. But if we draw near to the Father, following the example of his Son, we automatically come closer to one another (Figure 5). Thus our highest fellowship comes in implementing Christ's fellowship with the Father in ourselves.

Note the title, "his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John never mentions "Jesus" without a title, either "Christ" (10x) or "son of God" (4:15; 5:5) (chart).⁵ By contrast, in the gospel,

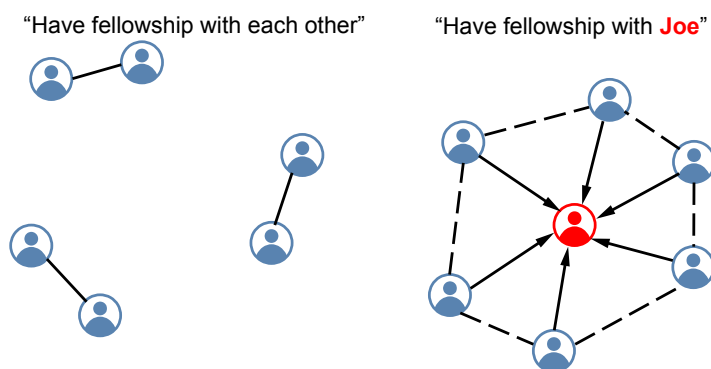


Figure 5: How having fellowship with the Father, as the Son does, enables us to have close fellowship with one another

- Christ alone appears 18x, mostly in speculation over whether Jesus is the Christ.
- Jesus alone appears 250x, by far the most common designation of our Lord
- Jesus Christ only 3x, John 1:17; 17:3; 20:31. The first and last are in John's commentary, not this history of the Lord's life and ministry. Nobody ever calls him this during his earthly life. But in 17:3, he describes himself this way to the Father in his high priestly prayer

The difference is due to a significant event that intervened: our Lord's exaltation.

Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in **Christ Jesus**: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 **Wherefore** God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that **Jesus Christ** is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Note order of the names. In Php 2:5, "Christ Jesus" moves from the divine name to the human one, introducing his humiliation and incarnation, as the divine Son of God becomes the man Jesus. The gospel records, focusing on his earthly life, call him "Jesus." But the Father raised him from the dead, exalted him to his own right hand, and at that point gave him the name above every name, the name of Lord, so that finally Paul proclaims him (Php 2:11) as Jesus Christ, tracing his exaltation from name of incarnation and humiliation that of exaltation and glory.

We should be careful to give him this simple honor in our daily speech.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.—Fulness of joy is a characteristic concept in John:

John 3:29 (John the Baptist) He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this **my joy therefore is fulfilled**.

John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that **my joy** might remain in you, and **that your joy might be full**.

⁵ It is remarkable that 1 John, along with 3 John among the NT books, never uses the title "Lord" κύριος *kurios* G2962 to describe the Lord Jesus. This distinction deserves some thought.

John 16:24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, **that your joy may be full.**

John 17:13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, **that they might have my joy fulfilled** in themselves.

Two of these verses are particularly helpful in explaining 1 John 1:4. Both 15:11 and 17:13 describe our fulness of joy as coming from the Lord's joy. Consider 15:10 in its context:

Jhn 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

The whole point is that his relation with the Father is the model for our relation with him. Note the three comparisons in these three verses:

- 15:9 as the Father loved me, so have I loved you
- 15:10 as I abide in the Father's love, you abide in mine
- 15:11 as I rejoice, so you rejoice

John 17:13 also says that the joy of the disciples is derived from the Lord's joy, which comes from his intimate fellowship with the Father. So in 1 John, as the believers imitate that fellowship with the Father, they will experience the very joy of Christ.

1:5-2:2, The Foundations Of Fellowship

This section begins with a foundational truth, and then uses it to discuss sin in the believer's life.

1:5 The Foundational Truth

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.—Now John lays down the fundamental principle of a life lived in fellowship with God. It begins with a recognition of the absolute holiness of God.

John claims to have heard this claim from the Lord Jesus during his earthly life. Where did our Lord teach this during his earthly walk? He never made this statement in so many words. But he did claim to be the revelation of the Father (chart):

Jhn 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, **he hath declared him.**

Jhn 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? **he that hath seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

And he claimed to be light, overcoming darkness in those who trust in him:

Jhn 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world**: he that followeth me **shall not walk in darkness**, but shall have the light of life.

Jhn 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Since he reveals the Father, and since he is undarkened light, the Father must be light without darkness at all, and in John 12 the Lord says something very close to this:

Jhn 12:44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. 45 And **he that seeth me seeth him that sent me**. 46 I am come a **light** into the world, that whosoever believeth on me **should not abide in darkness**.

So 1 John1:5 is probably a reference to John 12:44-46.

1:6-2:2, Solving the Problem of Sin

1:5 poses a problem for us, for we are sinful.⁶ How can sinful people attain fellowship with God like that of the Lord Jesus? 1:6-2:2 answers this problem in an alternation of three panels (Table 4, chart), discussing deliberate, discovered, and dark sin (cf. “dark matter,” present but unseen). The first panel answers the claim that sin doesn’t matter. The second answers the claim that I’m not aware of any sin in my life. The third answers the claim that I’ve reached sinless perfection.⁷ Each panel consists of two conditional statements (if ... then ...), and thus has four parts:

- First condition: the problem
 - a false claim of spiritual health that we might make (“if we say ...”)
 - the danger of deception (“we lie ... we deceive ourselves ... we make him a liar”)
- Second condition: the solution
 - the condition of enjoying the remedy
 - the remedy to our sin problem

In the third panel, an exhortation intervenes between the two conditions.

This review of sin makes two main points.

| | | 1:6-7 Deliberate Sin | 1:8-9 Discovered Sin | 1:10-2:2 Dark Sin |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| 1 st Condition: The Problem | Claim of spiritual health: “if we say ...” | :6 if we say that we have fellowship ... walk in darkness | :8 if we say that we have no sin | :10 if we say that we have not sinned |
| | Danger of deception | we lie | we deceive ourselves truth is not in us | we make him a liar his word is not in us |
| | Exhortation | | | 2:1 My little children ... do not sin |
| 2 nd Condition: The Solution | Condition | :7 if we walk in the light | :9 if we confess our sins | :1 if any man sin (!) |
| | Remedy | we have fellowship ... the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us | he is faithful and just to forgive ... cleanse ... | :2 we have an advocate with the Father |

Table 4: How to Overcome Sin

1. We all have a problem with sin.
2. God always has a solution.

Thus it offers us hope, so we will not be discouraged as we consider the signs of life.

⁶ Following Brown, most recent commentaries understand this section to describe the secessionists. I disagree. 1. The secessionists have not yet been introduced to the discussion (they come up for the first time in 2:8-19). 2. John repeatedly says “we,” not “they” or “one,” which one would expect if he were characterizing his adversaries. Westcott, Alford, and Law also understand this section to refer to John and his readers.

⁷ See notes for the relation of these three categories to Num 15:22-31 and Psa 19:12-13.

1:6-7, *Deliberate Sin*

In the first panel, people knowingly tolerate sin in their lives, saying, “Sin doesn’t matter.”

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness,—The first false claim of spiritual health that John considers is that we can have fellowship with God even while sinning deliberately. This attitude characterized some who come under the gnostic umbrella. If salvation is a purely spiritual condition, attained by the knowledge of God, it doesn’t matter how we live.

we lie, and do not the truth:—Such conduct is a direct contradiction of the principle in 1:5, and of the teachings of our Lord that John is citing. In particular (chart),

Jhn 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world:** he that followeth me **shall not walk in darkness**, but shall have the light of life.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and **what communion⁸ hath light with darkness?**

Of the three accusations of deception, this is the most direct. It’s an outright lie to claim that open sin doesn’t matter to our fellowship with God. The deception is not only verbal, but practical: “we ... **do** not the truth.”

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,—The remedy for deliberate sin is deliberate obedience. To walk in the light is to live according to the example of the Lord Jesus.⁹

The Psalmist expressed a similar thought:

Psa 119:105 Thy **word** is a lamp unto my feet, and a **light unto my path**.

David was no doubt thinking of the written word, which continues to guide us. But we now have the example of the incarnate Word of God, the Lord Jesus, to guide us even more clearly.

Jhn 1:1 In the beginning was the **Word**. ... 4 In him was life; and **the life was the light of men**. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.



Figure 6: Walking in the light
(<https://www.rawpixel.com/image/6043214>, public domain image)

“Walking in the light” suggests the experience of walking through the woods at night with a flashlight (Figure 6). If we step where the light is shining, we can avoid running into a tree or tripping over a fallen branch. If we choose to walk in darkness, we can’t tell where we are going:

1Jn 2:11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. (cf. John 12:35)

Deliberate obedience to the Word of God, written and incarnate, brings two wonderful results.

we have fellowship one with another,—First, our fellowship with God, and thus with one another, is restored.

8 κοινωνία *koinōnia* G2842, same word as throughout 1 John 1.

9 Christ both is the light, and walks in the light; cf. 1 Tim 6:16 of the Father.

But what about the deliberate sin that broke the fellowship in the first place? How can we make it right? The second result assures us that God has taken care of this as well:

and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.—Our Savior’s blood, the perfect sin offering, cleanses us from all sin. We can add nothing to it. If we are obeying his word now, we need not worry about past disobediences. He has taken care of them all.

1:8-9, *Discovered Sin*

In spite of our intention to walk in the light, we sometimes stumble, and then the Spirit shows us that we have sinned after all. This is discovered sin, discovered after the fact.

8 If we say that we have no sin,—This claim is distinct from 1:10, “we have not sinned.”

John uses the expression “have sin” in his gospel, in a way that makes clear what it means. After healing the blind man, he engages the Pharisees.

John 9:39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. 40 And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? 41 Jesus said unto them, **If ye were blind, ye should have no sin:** but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

If they were incapable of understanding what he says, they would not “have sin.” They might still sin, and be guilty of it. If you break the speed limit and don’t know it because your speedometer is broken, you “have sinned,” but you do not “have sin,” you are not conscious of it. The Lord uses the expression again in the same sense, twice, in the upper room:

John 15:22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, **they had not had sin:** but now they have no cloke for their sin. ... 24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, **they had not had sin:** but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

The Jewish leaders “had sin” because they rejected Christ in the face of his clear teaching (15:22) and his miracles (15:24). They sinned, and they knew that they had sinned. To “have sin” is to be conscious of a sin. The person who says “I have no sin” is saying, not that sin doesn’t matter, but that I don’t know of any sin in my life. This also is an error.

we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.—Even when we are deliberately walking in the light, we stumble. In many cases, particularly if we are sensitive to the Spirit’s voice, we know that we have stumbled. A claim that we do not “have sin,” that we are not conscious after the fact of our shortcomings, is false.

9 If we confess our sins,—The solution to discovered sin is to confess it. The verb *ὁμολογέω* *homologeō* G3657 means “to agree, to say the same thing” (chart).

- When a criminal confesses, he agrees with the district attorney that he violated a specific law.
- When we make a “confession of faith,” we agree with the words of some creed.

This insight suggests a practical way to deal with discovered sin. We need to agree with God’s condemnation of it. The Spirit will let us know that we sinned, but confession is more than saying, “Ouch! I feel that spanking.” It is agreeing with God that what we did is wrong. And we do that by fixing our attention on a portion of God’s word that condemns what we did.

Recall the solution to deliberate sin: walk in the light—the light of God’s written word, the light revealed in the life of the incarnate Word. Find a passage of scripture that condemns your sin, or an example in the life of the Lord Jesus that contrasts with your sinful conduct, and based on that text, prayerfully agree with God that what you did is sinful.

Figure 7 shows how biblical confession strengthens us against future temptation. Recall that each time our Lord was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, he replied with a text of Scripture.

Mat 4:4 But he answered and said, **It is written (Deut 8:3)**, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Mat 4:7 Jesus said unto him, **It is written again (Deut 6:16)**, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Mat 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for **it is written (Deut 6:13-14)**, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

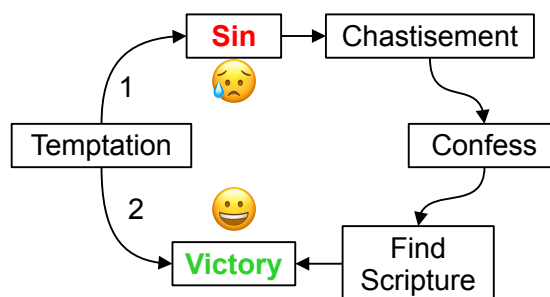


Figure 7: Learning from Confession

Confessing our sin, finding what God says about it and agreeing with him, builds up an armory of texts that address the sins we most often face, and strengthens us against future temptation.

But still, we sinned. Confessing our sin doesn’t change that. How can the demands of a just and holy God be satisfied? Now we have the remedy, again twofold. 1:7 offers us fellowship and cleansing, while 1:9 offers us forgiveness and (again) cleansing.

he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,—First, he will not hold us accountable for the sins that he reveals to us, and that we confess. The alienation that sin brings between him and us (Isa 59:2) is done away. This forgiveness demonstrates two of his attributes (chart):

1. He is faithful. In revealing himself to Moses, he promised to forgive sin, and he has faithfully fulfilled that promise in the Lord Jesus.

Exo 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

2. He is just (righteous), because he has not suspended his moral law, but provided a substitute.

Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, **to declare his righteousness** for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be **just**, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—The second assurance is the same as in the case of deliberate sin. The sacrifice of Christ is comprehensive and exhaustive. It leaves nothing behind to condemn us.¹⁰

¹⁰ Unrighteousness ἀδικία *adikia* G93 appears in 1 John only here and in 5:17, where it is equated with sin: “all unrighteousness is sin.”

1:10-2:2, Dark Sin

The third category is sin that we have committed, but of which we are not aware. The title “dark sin” comes from an astrophysical metaphor. The equations of general relativity, our current best model of gravitation, require the universe to have more mass in it than we observe. Astronomers call this missing mass, “dark matter.” The theory says it must be there, but we can’t see it.

By analogy, there may be sin in our lives of which the Spirit has not yet convicted us. Like a wise parent, our heavenly Father does not insist that we grow into maturity all at once. He focuses on the most important things first, and a conscientious believer may be concerned about sins that are not only inadvertent, but also not yet conscious.

10 If we say that we have not sinned,—In 1:8, “have sin” referred to being conscious of sin, perhaps after the fact. But “have sinned” is simply the perfect tense of the verb “to sin.” Can we assume that, obeying the Lord as best we know how, and confessing all sins that he reveals to us, we are now sinless? Can we ever say, “I am free from sin”?

we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.—Even here, we are wrong. We are not deceiving ourselves. We truly may not be aware of this sin. But God’s word says,

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

So this claim makes him a liar. Paul reaches this conclusion from a string of OT passages:

Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (Eccl 7:20)

11 There is none that understandeth,
there is none that seeketh after God.

12 They are all gone out of the way,
they are together become unprofitable;
there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3)

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; (Psa 5:9)
with their tongues they have used deceit; (Psa 10:7)
the poison of asps is under their lips: (Psa 140:3)

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:(Psa 10:7)

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:

17 And the way of peace have they not known: (Isa 59:7-8)

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Psa 36:1)

So anyone who claims never to have sinned, is contradicting God’s explicit revelation concerning the depravity of our race. Even if we have forsaken all deliberate sin and confessed all discovered sin, there will still be shortcomings in our lives.

Consider Paul’s testimony in 1 Corinthians,

1Co 4:4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

Even though he had confessed all known sin, he still could not assume that he was sinless.

Why does God not show us all of our dark sin immediately? He is dealing with us as a wise parent does with children, addressing the more serious matters first. We may not be able to understand some forms of sin until we have matured to a certain point. Over time, he will shine his light on more and more of our dark sin, turning it into discovered sin so that we can confess it. But until then, how can we maintain fellowship, knowing that this sin is lurking in us?

2:1 My little children,—John interrupts his structure with a personal exhortation. He uses a number of titles to address his readers (see note). This is the most common one, and emphasizes his role as their spiritual parent. The only other NT writer to refer to “my little children” is Paul to the Galatians (chart),

Gal. 4:19 **My little children**, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, He has led them to Christ, and considers them particularly as his children. (Compare 1 Cor 4:15 “in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”).

these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.—The notion that God takes care of dark sin is a dangerous one. It might encourage some people to have a careless attitude toward sin. John seeks to avoid any such misunderstanding. We are to strive against sin, to avoid it all costs.

But there is dark sin, and John uses the next element of his alternation to emphasize this sad fact.

And if any man sin,—We expect the remedy here that we are to take. But this is dark sin, sin of which we are not aware, in spite of our diligence to forsake deliberate sin and confess discovered sin. We are not to despair over this.

we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:—The solution to dark sin lies in the ongoing ministry of the Lord Jesus as our advocate, our intercessor.

Rom 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, **who also maketh intercession** for us.

Our version has “also” καί in the last clause, but it also appears in the previous two, emphasizing the sequence of things that Christ has done to assure us that he will not condemn us.

- He died for us, bearing our penalty in our place.
- Not only that, but he **also** rose again, proving that his sacrifice was accepted.
- Not only that, but he **also** ascended to the right hand of the Father.
- Not only that, but he also continually makes intercession for us to the Father,

Hebrews 7 summarizes this same wonderful provision?

Heb 7:24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing **he ever liveth to make intercession** for them.

We may not know when we commit some sins. But that sin is known, by two parties.

Satan, heaven’s district attorney, knows it. He is constantly looking for ways to attack us, as he did Job (Job 2). In fact, he is called “the accuser of our brethren”:

Rev 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

But the Lord Jesus also knows it, for he felt its penalty when he died on the cross for us. And in heaven’s court, when Satan appears to accuse us of our latest slip-up, the Lord is there to prove that the sin in question has been dealt with. That is the point of the next verse:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins:—To understand “propitiation,” we need to see it in the context of other terms that describe what our Savior did to deal with our sin. These words fall into four categories, of which 1 John uses two (Table 5, chart).¹¹

11 The outline follows Trench §lxxvii, adding “cleansing.” See also Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*.

The previous two panels use the metaphor of *cleansing*. We are **defiled** by our sin, and the Lord has cleansed us. Following the imagery of the tabernacle, the

| Action | Effect | In 1 John? | Scope |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------|--|
| Cleansing | Remove defilement | 1:7, 9 | 1:7, 9 cleanse us |
| Redemption | Price Deliver from rival power | -- | Rev 5:9 thou ... hast redeemed us to God by thy blood |
| Reconciliation | Repair alienation from God | -- | 2 Cor 5:18 God ... hath reconciled us to himself |
| Propitiation | Appease God's wrath | 2:2 | 2:2 whole world |

Table 5: What happened on the Cross?

Lord is seen as a spotless sacrificial animal, and his blood is the agent of this cleansing.

The *redemption* category uses a variety of commercial words. Now his blood is a price that is paid, and he delivers us from a **rival power**, Satan.

Words for *reconciliation* emphasize the **alienation** that sin creates between us and our creator, and the Lord appears as a peacemaker, bringing us into fellowship with the Father

Propitiation is a gift given to an offended person to sooth their wrath. It emphasizes God's just **anger** against sin, and the Lord's death is depicted as calming that wrath.

Why does John change from the image of cleansing (1:7, 8) to that of propitiation? As we grow in the Lord, he will bring dark sin to our attention, and it will become discovered sin, so that we can confess it. But until then, it threatens to stimulate his just wrath. The death of Christ as a propitiation calms that wrath. It is the foundation for God's attribute of longsuffering, the fact that he is slow to anger:

Exod 34:6 The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, **longsuffering**, and abundant in goodness and truth,

That change also helps understand the final phrase in the section.

and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.—This benefit of the death of Christ is universal. The other three benefits, cleansing, redemption, and reconciliation, are not. In 1:7, 9, he cleanses *us*, those who have eternal life. If he were to cleanse the whole world, everybody would be saved. We know from many scriptures that this is not the case. While John does not speak of redemption or reconciliation, the NT also consistently applies these to those who have believed, not to the world in general,¹² again recognizing that some are still under Satan's power, and remain alienated from God. Why is propitiation extended to everybody?

The answer lies in God's longsuffering. The wicked are separated from God from birth:

Psa 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

God is constantly angry with them:

Psa 7:11 God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Why does he not destroy sinners the moment they are born?

The answer is that God is slow to anger toward all mankind, so that his elect will have opportunity to repent and believe the gospel.

¹² See note for discussion of the one apparent exception, 2 Pet 2:1.

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

This longsuffering is the result of the Lord's propitiatory work, calming his father's just wrath, and the whole world enjoys the benefits of that temporary reprieve.

John has now laid the foundation for his detailed exposition of the three signs of life. The eternal life that he is validating is nothing less than intimate fellowship with God, which will bring us into fellowship with God's people. Sin threatens that fellowship, and the signs to which John directs our attention will confront us with the reality of our sin, but at the outset he has explained to us the complete provision that Christ has made to deal with that sin, soothing God's just wrath until the time that he reveals specific sins to us, and purging them away in the blood of Christ.

It is worth noting how the vocabulary shifts as we move from the introduction into the body of the book (chart). While the purpose of the book is to define signs of eternal life, the word "life" itself is relatively rare in the body, and comes to prominence at the start and end (Figure 8). In between, the emphasis is on vocabulary that defines the signs of this life, such as the commandments that invite righteousness (Figure 9), our love toward one another (Figure 10), and abiding in the true faith (Figure 11). Each of these, and others that we will encounter, is concentrated in the three sections that expound the three signs, even though they are comparatively rare in the introduction and conclusion.

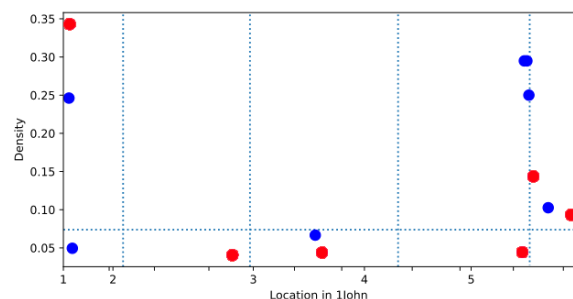


Figure 8: Life ζωή zōē G2222 in 1 John

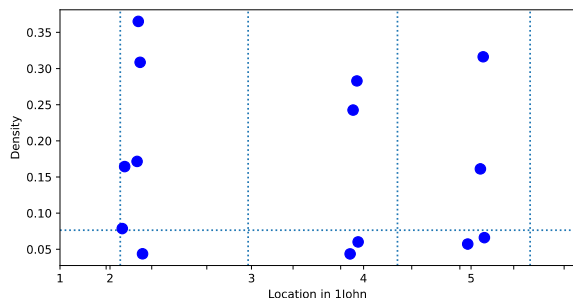


Figure 9: Commandment ἐντολή entolē G1785 in 1 John

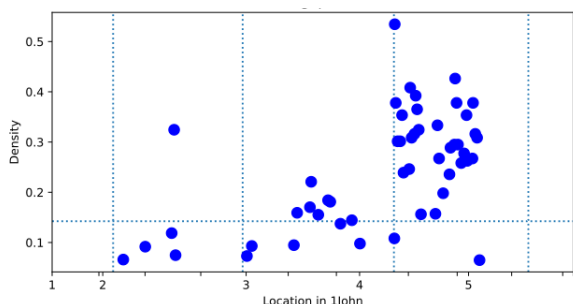


Figure 10: Love: noun ἀγάπη agapē G26, verb ἀγαπάω agaraō G25 in 1 John

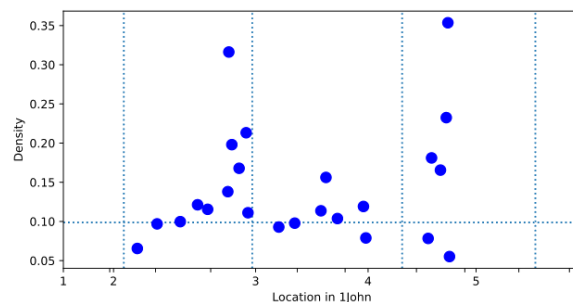


Figure 11: Abide μένω menō G3306 in 1 John

Notes

Knowledge

Two different Greek verbs. Abbot-Smith:

- γινώσκω *ginōskō* G1097: to know by observation and experience. This is the verb for knowing God (2:13-14).
- οἶδα *oīda* G1492: to know by reflection (a mental process, based on intuition or information). The truth (2:21), that he is righteous (2:29, no murderer has eternal life (3:15). This is the verb in 5:13.

Figure 1 does not distinguish between the two. Figure 12 does, along with the person of the verbs. Note the predominance of *oīda* in 5:13-21.

(Eternal) Life

Figure 13 shows this key word in the prolog, and again in the final concluding section, further confirming the existence of this last section.

Marks of the Sections

The repetition of the tests is seen in superimposed plots of words reflecting the three themes:

- For righteousness, “commandment” ἐντολή *entolē* G1785, “sin” ἁμαρτία *hamartia* G266, ἁμαρτάνω *hamartanō* G264, “righteous” δίκαιος *dikaïos* G1342, “justify” δικαιώω *dikaioō* G1344,
- For belief, “believe” πιστεύω *pisteuō* G4100 and the names “Jesus” and “Christ,”
- and “love” ἀγάπη *agapē* G26 (Figure 14).¹³

Compare the ordering in Table 2.

Trinity

Figure 15 shows the distribution of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father is concentrated in the first section of the book, the Spirit in the second, and the Son in the third.

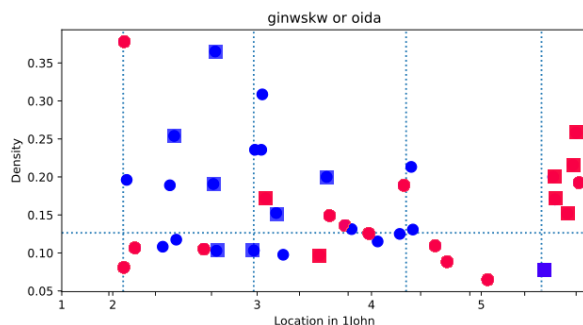


Figure 12: *ginōskō* (circle) vs. *oīda* (square); first person plural (red) vs. others (blue)

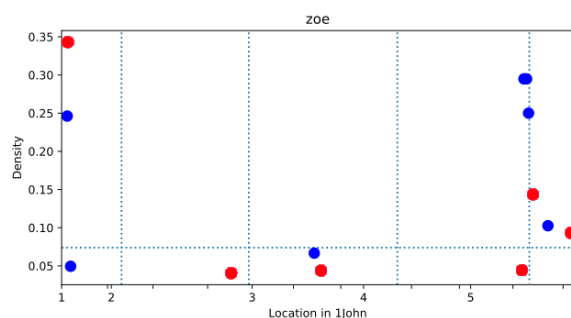


Figure 13: Life (red: eternal life)

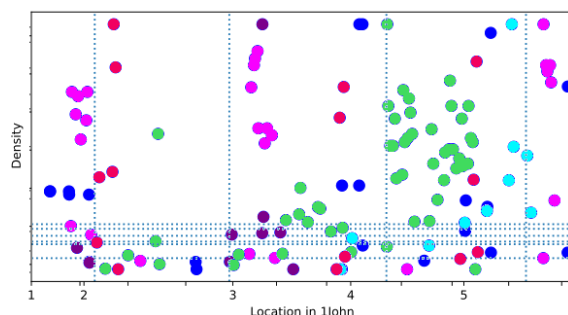


Figure 14: Jesus/Christ (blue), believe (light blue), commandment (red), sin (lavender), righteous(ness) (purple), love (green) in 1 John

¹³ The vertical density scales differ slightly in this figure and the next.

Manifest φανερώ *faneroō* G5319, φανερός *faneros* G5318

1 John uses this verb more densely (4.2/1000, Colossians is next at 2.5) than any other NT book. Figure 16 shows the distribution, along with the single appearance of the adjective *faneros*. Except for 3:2 “it doeth not yet appear what we shall be,” the verb always applies to the Lord Jesus, or (4:9) the love of God.

The verb is concentrated in the righteousness element of the second panel, and culminates in the adjective in 3:10,

1John 3:10 In this the children of God are **manifest**, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

In the prolog, Christ’s life with the Father is manifest for our imitation. In the concentration in ch. 3, we are reminded again that he was manifested, culminating in our manifestation as the righteous sons of God.

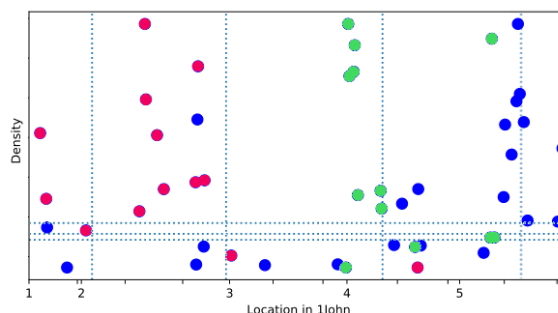


Figure 15: Father (red), Son (blue), and Spirit (green) in 1 John

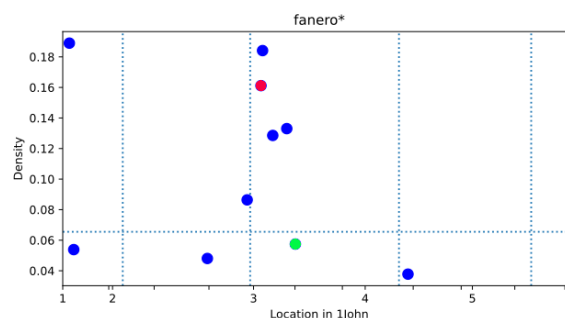


Figure 16: *faneroō* (blue, red) and *faneros* (green) in 1 John

John’s Categories of Sin and the OT¹⁴

Categorizing our sin by our knowledge or ignorance of it has an important parallel in the OT. Num 15:22-31. In summarizing the sacrificial law for the people in the wilderness, the Lord distinguishes two kinds of sins. Sins of ignorance (15:22-29, בְּשִׁגְגָּה), whether by the whole congregation or by an individual, are assigned specific sacrifices, but presumptuous sins (15:30-31, literally sins done “with a high hand” בְּזֵד רָמָה) have no such specified sacrifice, and instead are met with being cut off from the people. David seems to refer to these same two categories of sin:

Psa 19:12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults (שְׁגִיאוֹת). 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins (זְדִידִים); let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Hebrews alludes to this law in exhorting the believers:

Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

Two questions deserve comment.

First, how do these correspond with John’s three categories? The sins of ignorance must have been known at the time the believer offered sacrifice for them, and thus they would fall into the category of discovered sin. The presumptuous sin corresponds to the deliberate sin. Thus these laws do not deal explicitly with dark sin, though the repeated emphasis on “all” of Israel’s sins

¹⁴ Ron Nowlin has helpfully called attention to these parallels in our discussions on this passage.

and transgressions in Leviticus 16 suggest that the general offerings on the day of atonement dealt with these sins:

Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in **all their sins**:

Lev 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him **all the iniquities** of the children of Israel, and **all their transgressions in all their sins**, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:

Lev 16:22 And the goat shall bear upon him **all their iniquities** unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from **all your sins** before the LORD.

Lev 16:34 And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for **all their sins** once a year.

The second question is the difference between the lack of remedy for presumptuous sin in Numbers, with the promise of cleansing in 1 John for those who forsake their sin. The OT does recognize that a sinner who abandons the sin will find mercy with the Lord: Pro 28:13; Ezek 18:21; 33:14. The solution is not in the sacrificial system, but then that system provided no spiritual cleaning for any sin, Heb 9:9-14; 10:4. Only with the finished sacrifice of Christ is spiritual cleansing available for all sins.

In this light, Heb 10:26ff must be understood as a solemn warning to believers of the seriousness of deliberate sin, based on the OT legislation, rather than a limitation to the complete forgiveness available under the new covenant.

How John Addresses his Readers

Figure 17 shows where John addresses his readers directly, and the titles he uses for them:

- little children τέκνιον *teknion* G5040, dark blue, emphasizing parentage (diminutive of τέκνον *teknon* G5043, LXX for בן, emphasizing parentage and descent)
- little children παιδίον *paidion* G3813, light blue (diminutive of παῖς *pais* G3816, LXX for עבד, emphasizing age)
- young man νεανίσκος *neaniskos* G3495 purple
- fathers πατήρ *patēr* G3962
- brethren 2:7; 3:13 ἀδελφός *adelfos* G80, green
- beloved ἀγαπητός *agapetos* G27, red (in keeping with the emphasis in this section on our love for one another)

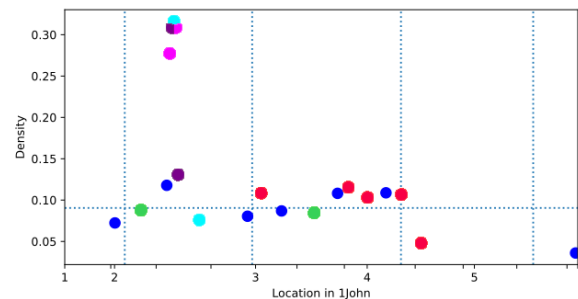


Figure 17: Vocatives in 1 John

In the gospel, the Lord Jesus addresses his disciples as τέκνία in the upper room, 13:33, then later as παῖδιά by the Sea of Galilee, 21:5.

2 Pet 2:1 and the Scope of Redemption

This is the one verse in the NT that describes those whom Christ as “purchased” as being damned:

2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that **bought ἀγοράζω *agorazō* G59 them**, and bring upon themselves **swift destruction**. ...
3 ...whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and **their damnation** slumbereth not.

Most references to redemption refer to deliverance from a power, either embedded in the verb itself (ἐξαγοράζω) or in an accompanying prepositional phrase (typically ἐκ or ἀπο). 2 Pet 2:1 implies the payment of a price, but without reference to the deliverance. When Peter speaks of the redemption of the believers, he uses a completely different word, λυτρόω *lutroō* G3084, derived from the verb λύω “to loose, release,” and thus implying deliverance. This reference is 1 Pet 1:18, which emphasizes their separation from their old life. He also speaks of their cleansing (2 Pet 1:9), again emphasizing the separation from the old life. 2 Pet 2:1 is thus very similar to 1 John 2:2, explaining why God can defer his wrath on the false teachers.

“Propitiation” G2434, G2435 appears in the NT only in Rom 3:25, Heb 9:5, and 1 John 2:2; 4:10. It is rooted in the OT sacrificial language. Paul, as a learned rabbi, would be acquainted with it, explaining its occurrence in Romans and Hebrew (which, following David Black, I understand to be based on Paul’s teachings), and John had priestly associations (John 18:16,19) which might have led to his acquaintance with the term. But propitiation in the OT ritual required the shedding of blood. Peter, who shows no knowledge of this technical term, may be using the bare ἀγοράζω much as John uses propitiation in 1 John 2:2, to explain the deferral of wrath rather than its removal.