**1 John Commentary**

**1 John Chapter 1**

1Jo 1:1

**“beginning.”** Occasionally someone will become confused by the word “beginning” in verse 1 and assume it refers to the fact that Jesus was with God in “the beginning.” The word “beginning” is very flexible in Greek, just as it is in English, and refers to the beginning of whatever is being referred to in the context. An example in English may help to clarify this. If a friend of ours walks into a movie theater after the movie has started, sits down next to us, and says, “I missed the beginning; tell me what happened,” we do not think he missed the beginning of creation. The meaning of “the beginning” is determined by the context.

Before we mention some of the things that “the beginning” refers to in Scripture, we should note that the Greek word translated “beginning” in 1 John 1:1 is *archē* (#746 ἀρχή), which itself has many meanings. The meanings of *archē* include the first person or thing in a series, the beginning, the leader (a person); the first place, rule or magistracy (an office); the origin or active cause of something; and the extremity of something.[[1]](#footnote-20415)

In its use in Scripture as “beginning,” *archē* refers to many things, including: the human race (Matt. 19:4); the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:8), the world (Matt. 24:21); the Good News about the presence and message of Jesus (Mark 1:1); the signs that Jesus did (John 2:11); Jesus’ public ministry (John 15:27); the start of Jesus training his apostles (John 16:4); the Christian Church (Acts 11:15); Paul’s early life (Acts 26:4); Paul’s missionary work (Phil. 4:15); the foundation of the earth (Heb. 1:10); the teaching of salvation by Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:3); of creation (2 Pet. 3:4); and of sin (1 John 3:8).

There are also times when it is not clear exactly what “the beginning” is referring to. For example, 1 John 3:11 refers to the message which the people heard “from the beginning.” It is usually assumed that this means from the first time they started hearing anything about the Gospel, but it could also be a more general use, referring to the beginning of the teaching of the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, as Mark 1:1 uses “beginning.”

Such is the case here in 1 John 1:1 as well, the use of “beginning” is not clearly defined, however, it most likely refers to the start of Jesus’ ministry.

**“we.”** The “we” that John is writing in conjunction with is not specified, but they are people who had been with Jesus and had seen, heard, and touched him, and now, years later, are still associated with the apostle John. The fact that John does not specify the “we” indicates that his audience at the time knew who they were, so we can quite confidently assume they were some of the “big names” in the early Church.

1Jo 1:2

**“….”** The ellipsis at the ending of 1 John 1:2 is meant to communicate that John never completes his sentence in verses 1 and 2. In the grammatical construction of 1 John 1:1-3, John begins with a subject, “What was from the beginning...” inserts a prepositional phrase, “concerning the word of life,” then the entirety of verse 2 is a parenthetical statement about the word of life. Then, instead of finishing the sentence, John restarts it again at the beginning of verse 3, picking back up with what he mentioned in verse 1, “What we have seen and heard,”[[2]](#footnote-19891) and then finally arrives at the first verb of the whole section, “we also declare to you.” It is a complex grammatical construction, but is made clearer by the use of the ellipsis at the end of 1 John 1:2.

1Jo 1:3

**“we have seen.”** Although John never specifically says who the “we” is, we can glean from the context that it is the other apostles who have seen Jesus.

**“so that you also can have fellowship with us.”** The Greek word translated “fellowship” is *koinōnia* (#2842 κοινωνία, pronounced koy-no-'nee-ä). It refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing; “fellowship,” “sharing,” “communion.” From that fundamental definition, it came to refer to the love or goodwill that comes with a close relationship; thus, generosity, sharing, participation. It also came to refer to the result of close association, which is sharing, giving, a gift, or a contribution. Here, as in Acts 2:42, *koinōnia* refers to all the aspects of the word “fellowship:” there was the intimate joint participation among the believers, the love and goodwill that comes with that relationship, and also sharing, giving, gifts, and contributions among the community of believers.

A very helpful definition of “fellowship” (*koinōnia*) is “intimate joint participation.” To help us understand “intimate joint participation,” we need to understand what those words mean. In a social situation, the word “intimate” brings in an aspect of personal openness that occurs in true fellowship. Someone once defined “intimacy” as “in-to-me-see,” which is accurate and clear. It is amazing the extent to which we can be with others and never let them see into us. Many people can talk for hours without ever letting the listener “see” into them. That may be wise to do “on the street,” but it is certainly not how fellowship is supposed to work among Christians. Fellowship is also “joint participation.” We do not have “fellowship” if we are sitting by ourselves watching a preacher on TV, and similarly, we do not have “fellowship” if we are sitting in a pew watching one on stage but not participating in any way. To be true “fellowship,” there must be open and honest joint participation.

[For more on why we define *koinōnia* as “intimate joint participation,” see commentary on Acts 2:42.]

It is often overlooked in Christian circles that true “fellowship” is based upon like-mindedness. The value of the preacher up in front of the audience, or even the preacher on TV, or John writing here to the Church about the things that he had heard with his own ears and seen with his own eyes, was that it produced like-mindedness among the believers. John taught them “so that they could have fellowship,” and without some measure of like-mindedness, they would not be able to have fellowship.

John was writing to fellow Christians whom he had discipled and with whom he was in an intimate relationship. This is shown by the fact that seven times he calls them “children” and six times “beloved.” When he calls them “children” (using *teknion* and *paidion*; 1 John 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), he is using the word in the Semitic sense of someone who is beloved and is a personal disciple. John had mentored these disciples and was writing to them as a concerned father. (We should note that the meaning of “children” in 1 John 2:12-13 is different from the use in 1 John 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4 and 5:21. In 1 John 2:12-13, the word “children” refers to disciples who are immature in the faith. In those two verses, “children” is contrasted with “young men” and “fathers,” who are more mature in the faith. In a culture that used “children” and “father” terminology to refer to literal fathers and children, and also mentor and disciple, and lover and beloved, the change of emphasis in the word “children” in 1 John 2:12-13 would be easily noticed and cause no problems for the reader.)

John is writing to people he has personally trained and loves dearly, so he is not writing to get them saved. His disciples have been under assault. “Many antichrists” had arisen (1 John 2:18), and “went out from us,” meaning they had once been fellowshipping with John and those with him, but had left John’s company, presumably because they did not agree with what John was teaching and doing. Some of those people were no doubt part of the “many false prophets” that were in the world (1 John 4:1). John warns his beloved children not to simply believe the “spirits,” the prophecies, that come from prophets, but to test them to see if they are true. Since no Christian would “just believe” a prophecy from a non-believer or a prophet or oracle of one of the ancient or Greco-Roman gods, the fact that John writes and tells the people not to believe every prophecy shows that the ones giving the prophecies were professing to be Christian

[For the use of “spirit” as a prophecy or manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12.]

John’s beloved disciples were being confused by these deceived Christians who had become false prophets and even against Christ, but still had some credibility and could demonstrate some spiritual power. Apparently, some disciples were even being drawn away to idol worship (1 John 5:21). Thus, John wrote to them to shore up or reestablish like-mindedness with his beloved disciples so that he and they could have “fellowship” (intimate joint participation). John knew what many Christians apparently do not: that when Christians disagree on fundamental points of the faith, there cannot be true fellowship with one another. We each instinctively know this and feel comfortable being around people who believe like we do.

Scripture says, “What fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). However, there are Christians who try to downplay major disagreements, saying things like, “Why can’t we just get along” or “We can still worship together even if we disagree.” This kind of talk misses the point. There is great value in truth and often great harm in error. Why did John even fight for the truth of the faith if it was not important? Why did Paul say if someone taught another Gospel he should be accursed (Gal. 1:8)? Why did Jesus say over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...,” and tell the disciples to leave the erring religious leaders alone, saying they were blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 5:21-48; 15:14)? Why did Jude say we should “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 1:3)? The whole Bible shows the contest between good and evil. God does not say to worship with evil or error, He says, “Come out from the midst of them, and be separate, says *the* Lord, and stop touching anything unclean, and I will welcome you” (2 Cor. 6:17). Obviously, we all err, and no one can claim to have the whole truth. But it is wrong to think that because of that we all can, or should, fellowship together. We can worship together to some degree, certainly, but “intimate joint participation” (“fellowship”) requires like-mindedness, and so John says he is writing to his disciples about what he has seen and heard so they could believe the same things and then fellowship together.

**“and *indeed* our fellowship is with the Father.”** It seems clear from the scope of Scripture that the “our” here is the apostle John and his companions, and also the ones he is writing to. John is writing so that all the believers can fellowship together, so he and his companions (“we”) write to believers (“you”) so that “our fellowship,” i.e., the fellowship of all of us together, is with the Father and Jesus Christ. John would not be saying that “our fellowship” (the fellowship of just John and his companions) was with the Father and Jesus Christ; John was trying to be more inclusive than that.

**“with his Son Jesus Christ.”** Christians are to have “fellowship” with Jesus Christ as well as with the Father and each other. The key to understanding “fellowship” with Jesus is knowing what “fellowship” is, which we covered above (see “fellowship”).

Our relationship with Jesus is to be intimate, that is, open, honest, and heartfelt. We are to be totally open and honest with him. Similarly, our relationship must be one of “joint participation,” that is, both sides participate. “Fellowship” is not one-way, with one party doing all the communication. Jesus guides and directs us, teaches us, and blesses us in countless ways. We, in turn, listen to his instructions; pray to him, ask him for help or direction; praise him; thank him for what he has done and continues to do for us, and in general, share our hearts and lives with him. The old song goes: “I have found a friend in Jesus, he’s everything to me,” and Jesus is indeed to be a true friend to us, intimately involved with our lives on a daily basis.

It makes perfect sense that we are supposed to have intimate joint participation with Jesus because he is both our Lord and the Head of the Body of Christ, of which we are individual parts. In both his functions as “Lord” and “Head,” it is axiomatic that he be in communication with people. He cannot function as “Lord” if he cannot communicate with those people subject to him, and he cannot be “Head” in any meaningful way unless he can be in communication with his Body, the Church. But that communication is not a one-way street. We cannot truly have Jesus as our “Lord” or “Head” if we cannot communicate with him, ask him for things, and get the information and help that we need.

At the Last Supper, only hours before his arrest, Jesus made some very powerful statements to his disciples about how he would relate to them after his death and resurrection, and some of what we can expect in the way of “fellowship” with him. We can ask him for things and expect him to respond to our requests, and if we obey him, he will show himself to us, revealing himself and his ways. For example, Jesus said, ”If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). He also said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21).

If we discipline ourselves to love and obey Jesus Christ, we can have, and should expect to have, an intimate and vital relationship with him and his Father, God. Although some Christians have been taught that we cannot pray to Jesus, this verse is strong evidence that we can indeed pray to Jesus. The very essence of “fellowship,” intimate joint participation, means that we could ask those people with whom we have fellowship for help if we needed it, and that certainly includes both God and Jesus.

[For more information on prayer to Jesus, see commentary on John 14:14.]

1Jo 1:4

**“so that.”** This verse contains the stated purpose of the Epistle: “so that our joy may be made full.” The verse contains two textual variants, both concerning pronouns. (1) Instead of the pronoun “we” (#2257 ἡμῶν) with the verb “we write,” some texts change the pronoun to read “to you” (#5213 ὑμῖν), and (2) Some texts read, “your” (#5216 ὑμῶν) joy rather than “our” (#2257 ἡμῶν) joy. These differences can be seen between the KJV and ASV translations:

ASV **1 John 1:4** and these things **we** write, that **our** joy may be made full. KJV **1 John 1:4** And these things write we **unto you**, that **your** joy may be full.

The textual reading represented in modern versions is to be preferred: “we write these things” rather than “we write to you,” and “our” joy rather than “your” joy. Both these readings not only are supported by better texts, they also conform to the textual criticism principle known as *lector difficilis*—that is, that the more difficult reading is most likely correct.[[3]](#footnote-23044) In the first case, a scribe would be much more likely to change the text to the natural “to you” rather than change it to “we,” which is already communicated in the verb “we write.” It is likewise easier to account for the change from “our” joy to “your” joy, as it may seem more natural for John to be writing so his readers’ joy could be made full rather than his own (for a more detailed explanation of the textual evidence for “our” see the text note on the NET Bible).

Why then does John speak of “our” joy being rather than simply his readers’ joy? The answer lies in the full context of his stated purpose for writing the letter. In the first three verses, John dictates that he declares what he has seen, “so that you too may have fellowship with us.” Thus, the reference to “our” joy being made full is in the context of having full sharing together as Christians, the “our” is John and the believers together.

1Jo 1:5

**“message.”** From the Greek word *angelia* (#31 ἀγγελία). The messenger is the *angelos* and the message he brings is the *angelia*. Interestingly, this word only occurs twice, here and in 1 John 3:11.

**“heard from him.”** The “him” is Jesus Christ. John 1:18 says that Jesus Christ made known the Father, and he made Him known in a fuller and more accurate way than had ever been done before. In fact, Jesus so modeled the character of the Father that he said that anyone who had seen him had seen the Father (John 14:9). This statement is very profound because it not only tells us about God in an unconditional way, but it clarifies something that was not really clear in the Old Testament (and is still believed by many), that God, for reasons unknown to us, causes human suffering. The full revelation that in God was “no darkness at all” came through Jesus Christ, and it is up to us to see that both in the Bible and in our hearts. When we have doubts about the goodness of God, we cannot love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

[For information on the “idiom of permission,” which makes it seem like God does evil, see commentary on Rom. 9:18.]

**“God is light.”** This is the figure of speech, anthropopatheia. The meaning of “light” in the mind of the Eastern peoples was rich and multifaceted. E. W. Bullinger correctly notes: “It would require a volume to investigate and carry out all that is taught by this wondrous metaphor.”[[4]](#footnote-16068) The importance and blessings of “light” in the biblical culture are firmly anchored in their daily life and experience. At a time before any kind of bright and reliable lamp, light, or flashlight, the “light” from the sun was essential to life and activity on the earth. It is because of the physical blessings that light brought to the people, and because it is the very foundation of life and the first thing God needed to start life on earth (Gen. 1:3), that light was compared to many things in life. Light was helpful, healing, warming, and protective (in contrast, darkness was hurtful and something to be feared). “Light” was used to portray what was good, right, just, fair, and godly, and was used to convey the concepts of knowledge and truth. “Light” was also used to express God’s favor and the joy, blessings, and the prosperity that His favor brings. The word “light” often communicates so much meaning that assigning one verse to one meaning is almost impossible. It is more accurate to understand the full cultural meaning of “light” and then see how the individual verses fit into the cultural understanding (cf. Ps. 43:3; 119:130; Prov. 4:18; 6:23; Dan. 5:14 (KJV); 2 Cor. 4:6).

The many meanings of “light” are reflected throughout the Bible. Thus, God is said to be light; the Messiah was the light of the world (John 8:12); The Word of God gives light (Ps. 119:105); people who are godly and walk in truth are said to dwell in the light and be light (Eph. 5:8); a good king or ruler was the light (2 Sam. 23:4), and even just being alive is referred to as the “light of life” (Job 33:30; Ps. 56:13). The fruit of “light” in people’s lives was goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph. 5:9). In the days of Esther, when the Jews were delivered from the death sentence Haman had pronounced on them, they had “light” (Esther 8:16 KJV). God Himself is not only said to be light, but He covers Himself in light (Ps. 104:2), and lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). When God was present, His light often shone brightly (2 Chron. 5:13-14 KJV).

If the light is life-giving, good, and godly, then the most ungodly times are when the light does not shine, for example, when the sun will be darkened (Isa. 13:10; Jer. 4:23; Matt. 24:29). The evil of the crucifixion is clearly portrayed by the fact that even at high noon the sun quit shining and there was darkness over the land (Matt. 27:45).

The phrase “God is light” is a metaphor (a comparison using a form of the verb “to be”). “Light” is also used in the Word of God in a simile (a comparison using “like” or “as”; Matt. 17:2) and as the figure hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; 1 John 1:7).

[For an explanation of hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

1Jo 1:7

**“continue to walk…cleanses.”** The verbs for walk and cleanse are in the present tense; they are what grammarian Daniel Wallace refers to as *Broadband Presents*, expressing continuous action over a period of time.[[5]](#footnote-10593) Williams’ New Testament picks up on this and translates the verse, “if we continue to live in the light… the blood of Jesus his Son continues to cleanse us from every sin.” See commentary on 1 Peter 1:2 on how the blood of Jesus can continuously cleanse us over a period of time.

**“sin.”** Although the exact parameters of sin can be hard to define, a basic definition of sin is that it involves breaking the commands of God by commission or omission. To God, to many sinners, and to most people who are sinned against, sin is not just a concept or idea, it is a very real “thing.” Gary Anderson, professor of Old Testament at Notre Dame, says that the Bible does not treat sin as just a vague mental notion that something has gone wrong. “A wrongful deed creates in its wake some sort of ‘thing’ that has to be removed.”[[6]](#footnote-20539)

The Bible uses vocabulary and metaphors to show that, to God, sin is something real, not just an idea, and if we are going to really understand what sin is, what it does, and what must be done with it, we have to correctly understand the vocabulary that God uses when speaking about it.

God describes sin in very real terms. He refers to it as a weight that must be lifted or carried, and also as a debt that must be paid. He also describes it as something like dirt or blood that stains the hands and hearts of those who commit it. Sin makes us “unclean,” which is why Scripture says, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). Although we often talk about “sin” in general and intangible terms, when a person sins, it suddenly becomes very real. As Dr. Anderson says, it becomes some kind of “thing.” The person who sins has to “carry” the sin as if it were a weight. It creates a very real “debt” he has to pay, and it stains his hands and heart, making him unclean in the sight of God.

The Bible says that humans instinctively know good from evil (Gen. 3:22), and we clearly see that in the lives of children. Children know when something is taken from them or when they are being treated unfairly. Similarly, the person with a good conscience knows when he is doing wrong, and we speak of people having a “guilty conscience” when they sin and hurt others and then feel bad about it. God gave us the gift of conscience to help guide us, and thus also the gifts of guilt and shame that move us to humble ourselves and seek His forgiveness when we sin. However, many people ignore the tugging of their conscience until they cannot feel it anymore, and they become evil and unrighteous. The Bible says that “an unjust *person* knows no shame” (Zeph. 3:5), and they “have their own consciences seared as if with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). Nevertheless, just because sinners do not think they have sinned, or feel the weight of their sin, it is there, and they will be judged for it on Judgment Day unless they come to Christ, repent, and confess it.

There is a huge difference between sinning against someone and being sinned against, but sadly in day-to-day life, that difference does not seem to show up as it should. In fact, often in our modern world, the person who is sinned against seems to be worse off than the sinner. However, from God’s point of view, it is the sinner who has to carry the weight of his sin, pay the debt his sin creates, and be cleansed from his sin, while the person who has been sinned against does not carry any sin weight, incur sin’s debt, or have to be cleansed in God’s sight. Being sinned against is not sin, and does not incur God’s wrath or penalty.

Just as when a person with a good conscience sins and then sin suddenly becomes more than just an idea or concept, so too, when someone is sinned against, the sin suddenly becomes a very real thing” that must be paid for. The person who is sinned against usually pays in terms of mental, physical, and emotional suffering as well as often having to spend money to make things right again. The person whose car has been stolen knows that sin is not just an intangible idea. So does the woman who has been raped, the child who has been bullied, the person who has been crippled by a drunk driver, and so on.

The person who has been sinned against must be very diligent to see other people’s sin through God’s eyes, not the eyes of the flesh. From God’s invisible, spiritual, eternal perspective, it is the sinner who incurs the debt sin creates, but down here on earth, it is the innocent victim who usually has to pay for the sin and cover the cost of making things right in his life again. Although it is often the right thing to seek justice so that the sinner has to pay for the cost of his sin, too often, efforts to get any earthly justice or restitution are futile. In any case, sin always hurts, and the person who is sinned against must trust that God will bless him now and reward him later, and must forgive the sin and put the whole situation into God’s hands.

No one deserves to be sinned against, but neither did Jesus Christ, and he showed us how to deal with sin by living a sacrificial life and keeping his eyes on the glorious future, just as Moses did in Egypt (Heb. 11:24-26). If we respond to being sinned against by becoming angry, slandering, and seeking revenge, then we become sinners too, and by sinning, we put the weight of sin upon ourselves and have to carry it; we incur the debt sin created, and we get our hands and hearts stained. Forgiveness can seem to be a hard path to take, but it is the right path and a sinless path, and one that will be richly rewarded.

Although plenty of Christians talk a good talk about forgiveness, not everyone really walks it out properly. Jesus made it clear that we can rejoice when we are sinned against: “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, and insult you, and denounce your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because your reward in heaven is great… (Luke 6:22-23). In Colossians 1:24, Paul said he rejoiced in his sufferings as well. Forgiveness has to be complete and from the heart. Whether or not we seek retribution, we have not really forgiven if we maintain a simmering anger and continue to think and say evil things about those who have sinned against us.

One reason the Christian world is not as aware as it should be about the spiritual problems sin creates is that they are not aware of the specific and graphic words in Hebrew and Greek that God uses to describe sin and its consequences. Often, the way God deals with sin is simply translated under the broad category of “forgive.” One example is Psalm 25:18, which in many versions reads similarly to the NASB, “Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.” While that certainly expresses the core meaning of the verse, the Hebrew word *nasa* (translated “forgive” and covered in more detail below) is more graphic than just “forgive.” The verse could arguably be better translated as, “Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and carry away all my sins.” That translation allows us to see the heart of David the psalmist much more clearly: he has sinned and it is a great weight on his shoulders. He is afflicted and troubled by his sin, so he is pleading with God to come and lift the sin weight off of him and carry it away.

As has been stated above, one way that sin is described in the Hebrew language is that it is a weight and burden that the sinner has to carry. A good example of this occurs in the verses that describe the Day of Atonement, the one day of the year when the High Priest was required to go into the Holy of Holies twice: the first time to deal with his own sins, and the second time to deal with the sins of the people. On the Day of Atonement, a goat was chosen “for Azazel” (a name for the Devil; see commentary on Lev. 16:8). The High Priest laid his hands on the head of the goat and confessed all the sins of Israel, and by doing that he “put them on” the goat, who then “carried” all the sins of the people into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21-22). Thus, the goat is portrayed as a pack animal that must carry away all the sins of Israel.

Similarly, Isaiah 1:4 refers to sin as a weight and speaks of Israel as a people “weighed down with iniquity.” Israel’s sin was a heavy weight that the people were having to carry, but instead of humbly confessing their sin so God could come and carry it away, they added to their sin. Eventually, it became so heavy that they could not carry it and ended up having to “drag iniquity with cords made of deceit, and sin as if with cart ropes” (Isa. 5:18). Israel was so hard-hearted against God that they just continued their lies and deceit and used their lies to sustain their sin and drag it along behind them.

Leviticus 24:15 also portrays sin as a weight. It says, “Whoever curses his God will bear his sin.” Since sin is portrayed as a weight and must be carried, the verse could be expanded somewhat and translated as, “Whoever curses his God will carry the weight of his sin.” The word “carry” or “bear” is *nasa* (#05375 נָשָׂא sometimes spelled נָסָא), and it has a number of meanings, some of them even appearing to be contradictory. For example, *nasa* means “carry, bear, take” (cf. Lev. 5:1, 17), and it also means “take away, carry off, forgive” (cf. Exod. 32:32; Num. 14:19; Ps. 32:5). Since the word *nasa* can mean either that a person has to “carry” the weight of his own sin, or that the person’s sin is “carried away,” and thus “forgiven,” we must pay very careful attention to the context of the verse we are reading in order to properly understand what it is saying. Also, although most versions translate the word *nasa* as “bear,” that can be confusing because in today’s English, “bear” can also mean “endure,” but *nasa* does not mean “endure,” it means “carry.”

One example of the confusion that is possible because of the different meanings of *nasa* is Leviticus 10:17. Most older translations, such as the King James, speak of the High Priest eating the offering that was given to “bear” the sin of Israel, while most modern versions properly understand that the context shows the meaning of *nasa* is “take away.” Many verses show that the person who sins must “carry,” or more fully, “carry the weight” of sin (cf. Exod. 28:38; Lev. 5:1, 17; 17:16; 19:8; 20:17, 19, 20; 22:9, 16; Num. 5:31; 9:13; 14:33, 34; 18:1, 22, 23, 32; 30:15; Prov. 9:12; Isa. 53:12; Ezek. 4:4, 6; 14:10; 23:49; 44:10, 12). Sometimes the weight of the sin is so great the person dies from it (Num. 18:22).

That God describes sin as a weight that must be carried is graphic and communicates well because we feel the weight when we sin, and it can include mental, emotional, physical, and material consequences. Furthermore, the “sin weight” that is placed upon us cannot be removed by human effort. Although we can harden our heart and try to ignore the sin weight, it is still there; the only real way to get rid of the sin weight is to have God “carry away” our sin—forgive us—and thus take the weight of sin from us.

When we realize that sin places a weight on us that only God can remove, we face the decision of either hardening our hearts and carrying the weight by ourselves, or humbling ourselves before God and asking for, and accepting, His forgiveness. When we humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness, then God takes the sin weight from us. He will carry it away and get rid of it, just as David said: “Blessed is the one whose transgression has been carried away [*nasa*]” (Ps. 32:1). God carries our sin weight away, and then He “will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19), at which point the heavy weight sinks to the bottom of the ocean and is gone.

By New Testament times, it was much more common to refer to sin as a debt than a weight, but the understanding that sin was a weight does appear in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:1 tells us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entangles us.” Although this verse does not specifically describe sin as a weight, and there are “weights” that we have to deal with that are not sin, the general parallelism in the biblical text is good evidence that sin is being included in the “weight” that slows us down and the sin that entangles us.

As well as being a weight, God describes sin as a debt that must be paid. The idea of sin as a debt seems to have existed to some extent in the minds of the Jews before the Babylonian Captivity (Lev. 26:34; Isa. 40:2; 50:1), but it became a common way of thinking under the influence of the Aramaic language during and after the Babylonian Captivity. In Aramaic, one of the words for “sin” also means “debt.” That sin was a debt that needed to be paid is clearly represented in the Aramaic Targums and is also represented in the New Testament.

For example, Matthew and Luke both have the Lord’s Prayer, but with some differences. Matthew 6:12 reads, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” In contrast, Luke 11:4 reads, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” The people listening to Christ and the early Christians reading the Gospels were used to thinking in terms of sin being debt, so to them, Matthew and Luke were simply saying the same thing in two different ways—and if Jesus was speaking Aramaic at the time he spoke his prayer, which he most likely was, then both the meaning “sin” and “debt” were included in the same Aramaic word.

We can understand why Luke would say “sin,” while Matthew wrote “debt.” Translators translate in a way that relates well to the reading audience. The more Greek audience of Luke would not be used to thinking of sin as a debt because “sin” and “debt” are totally different words in Greek, so in writing down the words of Christ, Luke would say “sin” to clearly communicate to his audience what Jesus was saying. Matthew, however, was the most Jewish of all the Gospels and his audience would understand that when Jesus said, “forgive us our debts,” he meant “forgive us our sins,” so Matthew has “debts.” We can also tell that “debt” meant “sin” in the Gospel of Matthew because when Jesus starts explaining his prayer to the people, he makes it clear he is referring to sins by saying, “For if you forgive people their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their transgressions, your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:14-15).

We see sin equated with debt in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:23-25). The context of the parable is forgiveness of sin. Peter came to Jesus and asked him how many times he should forgive another person who sinned against him, and should it be up to seven times (Matt. 18:21). Jesus answered in a hyperbole, by saying up to seventy times seven, but obviously meaning as many times as the person asked to be forgiven, and then he told his disciples “The Parable of the Unjust Servant.” That parable is about a servant who owed the king a huge amount of money that he could not pay, so the king forgave the debt; but then the servant refused to forgive another servant a small debt, and the king was so enraged at this injustice that he had the unjust servant thrown in prison and tortured “until he paid back all that was owed” (Matt. 18:34). The point of the parable in the context is that sin creates a debt, and each of us owes a huge debt to God. But if we ask, He will forgive the debt, and we in turn should forgive those who owe a sin debt to us.

That our sin creates a debt with God is also alluded to in Colossians 2:14, which says that He “wiped clean the handwritten certificate of indebtedness *that was* against us which, by means of its regulations, was hostile to us, and He has taken it away, having nailed it to the cross.” God, through the work of His Son Jesus, wiped clean and thus canceled out the certificate of debt that we owed. Although the context of Colossians 2:14 is the debt we owe to God, the same vocabulary word and the same concept are used when we sin against other people. Ann Nyland points out this use of the Greek word *cheirographon* (#5498 χειρόγραφον; the handwritten certificate of indebtedness), saying it “was written by the person who owed the debt, and was an acknowledgment of all debts owed. It was a simple document and did not have to be legally registered in the court, quite like an IOU. No witnesses were required and it could be written by the person or a local scribe.”[[7]](#footnote-26872) When we sin against God, we owe a debt to Him, and when we sin against others, we owe a debt to them, too, and sometimes we cannot pay either debt. Although we should genuinely try to make restitution to our fellow man when we sin against them, our heartfelt repentance and confession to God will result in being cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:9).

Romans 6:23 also looks at sin in financial terms and refers to it as a wage that must be paid. Just as when sin is referred to as a weight, a debt, or something that stains us, when sin is referred to as a wage, there is a certain reality or “thingness” to it, it is not just an idea. Romans 6:23 says that “the wages of sin is death,” and to properly understand the phrase “the wages of sin,” we have to understand two things. The first is that the phrase “wages of sin” is a genitive of relation, and in this case, the relation between wages and “Sin,” who pays them, is the payment itself. Thus, the phrase could be loosely translated, “the wages paid by Sin is death.”

The other thing that we have to know to properly understand Romans 6:23 is that in a number of verses in Romans 6, “sin” is personified as a slavemaster and we are the slaves who work for him (Rom. 6:6, 7, 10-14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22), and so it is helpful to capitalize “Sin,” the slavemaster’s name. For example, Romans 6:12 says we are not to let the slavemaster “Sin” reign, or “be king,” in our mortal bodies, making us obey his lusts. However, despite our best efforts to not work for Sin, we still end up obeying Sin and continuing to sin. When we work for the slavemaster Sin, he owes us wages that he will pay, and the wages we receive is our death. Thankfully, Jesus Christ took our place and got paid the wages Sin owed us by dying for us. A more literal way of phrasing Romans 6:23 without the personification would be “the consequences of sin is death.”

Another way God communicates to us that sin has a certain “thingness” to it and is not just an idea is that when we sin, it stains us, and to be “clean” in God’s sight, we must have the sin stain washed away. The concept of things being “clean” or “unclean” is firmly rooted in the Old Testament and continues in the New Testament; it has to do with the commands of God and a person being holy in the sight of God by obeying them. The Bible never calls a person “unclean” due to being dirty, getting blood on himself while killing an animal for food, or not having bathed in a while. People who were unclean in the sight of God had to go through various rituals described in the Law to be “clean” again. Jesus Christ made it clear that ungodly behavior “defiled” a person and made him unclean (Mark 7:18-23).

King David understood that sin made a person unclean and that the only way to get clean again was to be cleansed by God. After he sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, he wrote, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:2, 7). The hyssop was a common plant that could be dipped in water or another fluid so that the fluid could then be sprinkled on something.

Hebrews also shows that sin stains the sinner and must be cleaned: “let us draw near [to God] with a true heart, in fullness of trust, having our hearts sprinkled *to cleanse us* from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with clean water” (Heb. 10:22). James 4:8 says, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

The way to be cleansed from sin is laid out in the New Testament in several verses. Acts 15:9 says that our hearts become cleansed by trust (“faith”), and truly, when we confess Christ as Lord and believe he was raised from the dead, our sin is cleansed and we are saved. As we continue to live our lives we continue to sin, and so to be cleansed, we go to God and humbly confess our sin: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

One of the ironies in the Bible is that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7). We normally think of blood as something that badly stains both flesh and clothing, but in God’s spiritual economy, if we want to be cleansed from the stain of sin, it is the blood of Jesus Christ that removes the sin stain—it is on the basis of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ that any sin stain can be cleansed.

Sin should not be ignored or toyed with. It creates a weight in our life that we have to carry and that only God can remove. It creates a debt that must be paid, and it stains us with a stain that can only be removed by the blood of Jesus Christ. If there is any good news about sin, it is that God has made it easy to remove it from us. We Christians must work hard not to sin, and also learn to be diligent to confess our sins and be cleansed from unrighteousness when we do sin.

1Jo 1:8

**“If we say that we have no sin.”** This phrase has a very broad application. A major reason for it being in 1 John has to do with the Gnostics, but it has a much wider application than just that. It seems that at the time of the writing of 1 John the Gnostics were claiming they could do as they pleased and not be contaminated by sin; that is, their behavior would not affect their relationship with God. Sadly, many Christians feel the same way today, that no matter how they behave, because Jesus Christ paid for their sin their behavior does not affect their relationship with God. But it does. It is clear from the Bible that God works especially closely with certain people and not with others. For example, God picked Saul to be the first king over Israel, but withdrew Himself from Saul when Saul became arrogant and sinful (1 Sam. 15:26-28). God said, “…those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt” (1 Sam. 2:30 NRSV).

To “say we have no sin” comes out in many forms. The bottom line, as we have seen, is that people think they can do what they want and it not affect their relationship with God. However, there are various explanations people give as to why their behavior is not really sinful or does not count as sin or affect their relationship with God. The Gnostics believed their “special knowledge” made sin irrelevant when it came to them. Some groups have taught that since the body is fallen flesh, sin is “natural’ and therefore God does not hold it against us. Some groups have taught that since Jesus paid for our sin, any sin we commit is already paid for without us having to confess it or be concerned about it. All of these groups, beliefs, and philosophies are shown false by the last phrase in the verse: “we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Let us not deceive ourselves and find out too late that there are genuine consequences for our sin. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “Surely there is not a righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin.” We need to obey 1 John 1:9 and confess our sins and get cleansed from them in God’s sight.

1Jo 1:9

**“If we confess our sins.”** Christ died so we could be righteous in the sight of God. And confession of sin is an important part of staying righteous in God’s sight. But to understand what it means to be righteous, we must realize that “righteous” is used two different ways in the New Testament, and both those ways are important to the Christian.

One way “righteous” is used in the New Testament is to describe the fact that the Christian has a guarantee of everlasting life that he did not earn by being “good” and he cannot lose by sinning. When a person gets “saved,” born again of God’s gift of holy spirit, the blood of Christ atones for his sin and he is declared to be righteous in the sight of God. God “declares” that we are righteous in His sight based on the work of Christ, even though we still sin and are still sinners. It is vital that the Christian understand that this declaration of “righteous” does not mean that Christians cannot sin in God’s sight or that there are no consequences for sin, because there are consequences for sin. However, when God declares us righteous based on the work of Christ, we receive the guarantee of everlasting life and do not have to fear dying in the Lake of Fire (see commentary on Rom. 3:20).

The other way “righteous” is used in the New Testament is to describe our behavior. Believers can be godly and have righteous behavior, or they can be ungodly and have unrighteous behavior. We see this second use of “righteous” in verses such as 1 Timothy 1:9; 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:16; Titus 1:8; 2:12 and 3:5. If a person acts “righteously” in the sight of God, that is, he does what is “right” in God’s sight, he will be rewarded. If a person acts unrighteously and sins, there are consequences for that sin. There are many verses in the Church Epistles and General Epistles about being rewarded or not having rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-17; 9:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 2 Tim. 2:22; 4:7-8; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 1:8).

It is impossible to live our lives without sinning. Everyone sins. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “Surely there is not a righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin.” But since there are consequences for sin, God has given us a way to get His forgiveness for the sins we have committed. We can have our sins forgiven so that they do not stop us from being rewarded in the future kingdom. God makes it clear that the way to have sins we commit expunged is to confess them. That confession of sin cleanses us from sin should not be surprising. For one thing, God has always made a way to get forgiveness for sin. He has never rejected anyone’s desire to be clean in His sight.

Confession with a pure heart has always been the actual thing that cleanses people from sin. Some people think that in the Old Testament it was sacrifices that cleansed people from sin, but the sacrifices themselves never cleansed people from sin, as is clear in many Old Testament verses (see commentary on Amos 5:22). On the other hand, there are many examples in the Old Testament that confession of sin cleansed from sin.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people on the sacrificial animal (Lev. 16:21). In the Law of Moses, when a person sinned against another person, the sinner was to confess his sin (Num. 5:7). The Psalmist knew the forgiveness that came with confession: “Blessed is the one whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the person to whom Yahweh doesn’t impute iniquity…. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps. 32:1,2, 5; cf. Ps. 38:18).

King David understood that to be forgiven, even for murder and adultery, what God wanted was a pure heart, not animal sacrifices (Ps. 51:16-17). Nehemiah confessed the sins of Israel before God (Neh. 1:6). Daniel understood the importance of confessing sin before God, and confessed not only his own sin, but the sins of Israel (Dan. 9:20). John the Baptist had people confess their sins as they were being baptized (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5). John understood that the water baptism was only a symbol of God’s cleansing, but that someone who did not have a pure heart was not cleansed just by water, so he had the people confess their sin as he was baptizing them. James said to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).

Confession of sin was the ancient way to be “right” in the sight of God, and 1 John 1:9 is only saying what the Bible had said many times before when it says that if we confess our sin before God we are cleansed of all unrighteousness; and if we are cleansed of unrighteousness, then we are left righteous in the sight of God.

Another thing to remember about the confession of sin is that when the Bible says we are to confess our sin, we do not have to remember each and every sin and confess it to be cleansed in the sight of God. If that were the case, no one could ever be forgiven. For one thing, we could never remember every sin we commit, and also, many times we sin and do not know it. The Bible shows us that we can be repentant before God for our sins and get forgiveness for them without specifically mentioning every sin. The best example of this in the Bible is the parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:10-14). In the parable, the tax collector, who would have certainly had many sins, would not even approach close to the inner Sanctuary of God, but just humbled himself before God and asked for mercy. Jesus said it this way: “But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I say to you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house righteous rather than the other [the Pharisee], for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Notice that the tax collector did not have to confess each of his sins, but rather just confess his sins in general. So too, for us to be forgiven of our sin, we just need to be humble before God and confess our sin to Him. When we do, we are totally cleansed in His sight. It is vital that Christians confess their sin before God, because He does not forget or ignore them. God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5), and the grace of forgiveness is given to those people who are humble enough to come to God and confess their sins to Him.

There is a teaching being promoted by some people that Christians have been forgiven their sins and are fully righteous in the sight of God and therefore do not have to confess their sin to be forgiven, and also that 1 John 1:9 is not even written to Christians but is written to the unsaved. That is a false and harmful teaching, and there is good evidence that 1 John 1:9 is written to Christians and that confession of our sins to God is very important.

Some of the confusion about this issue comes from the fact that Christians are forgiven of their sins when it comes to salvation: Christian salvation is never in doubt, whether one is a habitual sinner or not. The New Birth guarantees the Christian everlasting life. However, although confession of sin is not required to be saved, it is an important part of the fellowship that a Christian has with God and Christ. When it comes to confession of sin, there is more at stake than just salvation; also at stake are rewards in Christ’s future Kingdom on earth. Christians can habitually sin and not lose their salvation, but they cannot habitually sin and not lose rewards, which is why 1 John 1:9 and confession of sin are so vitally important. Confessing our sins is a part of restoring any broken fellowship we have with God and Christ.

Christians do sin, even sometimes habitually, and although that does not change the “Father and child” relationship they have with God, it does change their fellowship relationship. Fellowship between two people is not restored just because the one offending party simply stops their hurtful behavior; also needed to restore fellowship is confession of the wrong and asking for forgiveness. That is true of people, and it is true with God. Our active fellowship with God, and our rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ, depend in large part on our fellowship with God and Christ: our living in obedience to them and our making amends with them when we sin.

Groups that teach that Christians do not need to confess their sin, as 1 John 1:9 says, often teach that 1 John 1:9 is not written to Christians, but to unbelievers. But that is not the case. The context of 1 John 1:9 flows directly from 1 John 1:1, where “we” and “our” refer to and include the writer, the apostle John, who was a Christian. The “we” of 1 John 1:1 is used in every verse in the chapter and right on into chapter 2 without skipping a single verse. Thus, in order to make the assertion that 1 John 1:9 is to unbelievers, the “we” would have to change meanings from the apostle John and his associates to unbelievers, then back again, but there is no textual or contextual reason to make that change, and many reasons not to, since the subject of “sin” continues from 1 John 1:5 right into the rest of the book, and Christians constantly wrestle with sin in their lives.

Another reason that 1 John 1:9 is not to the unsaved about being saved is that confession of sins does not save anyone today. In the Administration of Grace in which we are living (Eph. 3:2), salvation is obtained by confessing and believing that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead—which is sometimes simplified in the Bible to just having trust in Jesus (Rom. 10:9; Acts 16:30-31; Rom. 3:22, 26; 4:24; Gal. 2:16). No doubt there have been many people saved since the Day of Pentecost who never confessed their sins, and sadly, there have also been people who confessed their sins but never personally took Jesus Christ as their personal living Lord and Savior and who thus were never actually saved, “born again.”

People who teach that 1 John 1:9 is not about a Christian confessing their sin and being forgiven usually say that if confession was necessary for sin to be forgiven, then it ought to be written about in many places, not just in 1 John 1:9. But it actually is written about in many places, and in many different ways. Confession of sin appears throughout the Old Testament and not just in relation to salvation, but also to restoring one’s fellowship with God (cf. Lev. 5:5; 16:21; 26:40-42; Num. 5:6-7; 1 Kings 8:33, 35; Ezra 10:1, 11; Neh. 1:6; 9:2-3; Ps. 32:5; Prov. 28:13; Dan. 9:4-5, 20; Matt. 3:6). When something is written throughout the Old Testament and affirmed in the New Testament, then we can be confident that it is the will of God. When we sin, going before God and the Lord and humbly and honestly confessing our sin restores our active fellowship with them and affects the rewards we will receive when Christ reigns as king on the earth. In fact, if the New Testament was going to change what was said over and over in the Old Testament and Gospels, then we would expect a verse that said something like, “Now, due to the work of Christ, it is no longer necessary to confess your sin,” but of course, there is no such verse.

A person who confesses their sin is forgiven instantly by God, but earthly consequences may continue. Thus, if someone steals something but is sorry and humbly confesses that sin to God, the person is forgiven right then by God; however, the person may still have to face the earthly court system for stealing. So in that sense, many times people will not see the true effect of their confession of sin until the Day of Judgment, when that sin will not be held against them.

[For more on “righteousness,” see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more about the New Birth and salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation” and see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3, “new birth.” For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the rewards believers can receive in Christ’s kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

**1 John Chapter 2**

1Jo 2:1

**“will not sin.”** Cf. NIV translation. This phrase is *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose clause (see Word Study: “Hina”). We went with “will” rather than “may,” because the *hina* clause shows John’s intention that they would not sin. On “will” vs. “may,” see commentary on Romans 8:17, “will be…glorified.”

**“we have an advocate *who intercedes for us* with the Father—Jesus Christ.”** There is some potential ambiguity in the English that the REV sought to avoid. The Greek text is literally, “we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ.” One way it could be taken is that “we have an advocate *along* with the Father,” meaning, “in addition to.” However, this understanding does not make sense, because there is no one greater to whom would the Father be advocating. He is the greatest being in the universe, with all power, and holds all justice in his hand, thus, God does not advocate to anyone, but humankind and Jesus plea to him. To avoid that potential misunderstanding, the REV has provided “who intercedes for us” in italics.

Here in 1 John 2:1, the “advocate” is Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated “advocate” is *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which shows up in the Gospel of John as the “helper,” and in that Gospel it refers to the gift of holy spirit (John 14:26). In the Gospel of John, Jesus told his disciples that he would no longer be present with them personally, but that he would send a “helper” to be with them, the holy spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

In the Gospel of John, the translation “helper” is warranted because the holy spirit is indeed a helper in many different ways, and the word *paraklētos* is general and the meaning is determined by the context: it can be a “helper,” “advocate,” “encourager,” “counselor,” etc., depending on the specific role that fits the context. But while “helper” is certainly appropriate for the gift of holy spirit, here in 1 John we are not to understand that Jesus is our “helper,” although he does help us. Rather, in this context about sin, Jesus Christ is our advocate and continually intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26, 27, 34; Heb. 7:25).

That the gift of holy spirit is our *paraklētos*, and Jesus Christ is also, shows the intimate connection between them. Jesus Christ was the one who gave us the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:33) and he works through it to form us into his image.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

1Jo 2:2

**“atoning sacrifice.”** The Greek is *hilasmos* (#2434 ἱλασμός), and it means an appeasement necessitated by sin, *expiation,* or an instrument for appeasing, *sacrifice to atone, sin-offering.*[[8]](#footnote-11929) Louw and Nida write:

God offered him as a means by which sins are forgiven through faith (in him)’ Rom. 3:25. Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. ἱλασμός and ἱλαστήριον denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation.[[9]](#footnote-29820)

The sacrifice of Jesus did not placate God, but rather was a provision that God, in His grace, made for mankind, so they would be accepted by Him and able to come into His presence. Other translations that read “atoning sacrifice” include the NIV, NRSV, Amplified Bible, and Williams. The New American Bible uses “expiation.”

[For more information, see commentary on Rom. 3:25.]

1Jo 2:5

**“reached its goal.”** The Greek verb is “*teleioō*” (τελειόω #5048), which means “to complete, accomplish, perfect, or to bring to its goal.”[[10]](#footnote-29202) Most translations translate this phrase along the lines of “in him the love of God has been perfected,” or “in him the love of God has been completed.” However, this communicates an idea that seems contrary to Scripture and logic. Is there something lacking in God’s love? Is his love not good enough, that we can somehow make it better or complete it? No, clearly not. We sinners do not make his love better, he has given us a pattern and standard of love that exceeds our own. He has called us to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44), and he loved us even when we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Thus, we do not complete or perfect God’s love, it is already complete and perfect, if anything, we fall short of it (Rom. 3:23).

The intended meaning of this verse is clearly seen when we realize that “*teleioō*” can mean “to bring something to its goal.” The intended goal of the love of God is multi-faceted; it is meant to produce many different things in us. For example, in 1 John 4:12, the goal of God’s love is that we would in turn love one another. In 1 John 4:17, the goal of love is that we would live as Jesus lived in this world. In 1 John 4:18, the goal of God’s love is that it would cast out all fear of punishment from us. If we are doing these things, then the goal of love is being accomplished in us.

Here in 1 John 2:5, John details that the goal of God’s love is that it would lead us to keep his word. If we are keeping his word, then that means that God’s love has accomplished its purpose in us. On the other hand, if we do not keep his word, then love is not accomplishing its goal in us. God’s grace is meant to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4), not to keep us stuck in our sin. This is God’s desire for our lives, and his intention in loving us.

**“in *union with* him.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

1Jo 2:6

**“remains.”** The idea is continues to remain, or “is remaining.” The Greek word is *menō* (#3306 μένω) and its meanings include: to stay in a place, to remain, to continue to be present, to be kept continually; to endure or last, to adhere to, to not change, to wait for or await. When it comes to our relationship with God and Jesus Christ, who are alive and working in us every day, it has a deeper meaning, which Thayer refers to as “mystic phraseology,” due to the fact our ongoing relationship with God and Christ is spiritual and thus hard to describe using words designed to describe worldly things. So it is no wonder that the English versions differ as to how to translate *menō*, and none of the English words are an exact fit. Some ways English translators have rendered *menō* in the Gospel and Epistles of John are: “abide,” “be in,” “continue,” “dwell,” “live,” “remain,” “remain attached,” “stay,” “stay united,” Thayer says its meanings include: “to maintain unbroken fellowship with one…to be constantly present to help one…to put forth constant influence upon one.”[[11]](#footnote-17909) Thayer goes on to say, “In the mystic phraseology of John, God is said μένειν in Christ, i.e., to dwell as it were within him, to be continually operative in him by his divine influence and energy.” According to Haas, DeJonge, and Swellengrebel, it means, “to be constantly present with (or joined to), to continue in/with, ‘to keep union with.’”[[12]](#footnote-11842) Stephen Smalley writes about the use of *menō* and says it:

“suggests an intensely personal knowledge of God; it presupposes an intimate and committed relationship with him, through Jesus, which is both permanent and continuous. To abide ‘in Jesus,’ moreover, indicates a close and personal relationship between the Father and the Son (cf. John 15:10); it guarantees eternal life; and it provides the power for living ethically as a believer.”[[13]](#footnote-26747)

We are introduced to this use of *menō* in the Gospel of John and John used it ten times in the course of the Last Supper in chapters 14 and 15, when he spoke of Jesus “abiding” in the Father, the Father “abiding” in Jesus, the holy spirit “abiding” in the apostles and them “abiding” in Jesus (and Jesus used the illustration of the vine and the branches to make his point clear).

As we said above, the problem we face in translating *menō* is that in the context of this intimate and continuing relationship between God and Jesus and us, no English word really gets the full sense of it. Many versions use “abide,” but that usually indicates a passive existence, like abiding someplace while waiting on something. In contrast, our relationship with Jesus and the Father is very active. The same problem exists with “reside,” although that seems better than “abide.” Sometimes “remain” fits, but it often does not communicate the intimate and continuous relationship that the Johannine use of *menō* is communicating. There are verses where “continue,” is good, but it does not seem to exactly fit many of the verses. In this case, where no English word quite catches the fullness of the meaning of the Greek, translators try to get a close match. So it seems that “remain” is a good choice because it communicates both the residency that “abide” or “reside” communicates, and the continuous presence that “continues” communicates. It may communicate too active a relationship, but that seems better than no action at all. Given the options, “remain” seems like a good choice for most of the Johannine use of *menō*.

1Jo 2:8

**“On the other hand.”** The Greek word is *palin* (#3825 πάλιν), meaning “again.” Here it has the meaning of “looking at it again,” that is, when returning to the thought, it turns out the command is new in quality. [Not a brand new commandment, but rather that the old commandment had a new quality to it].

1Jo 2:9

**“his brother or sister.”** Although the Greek literally reads “brother” this command is not to only love Christians who are male. In this context, this is a command to not hate one’s fellow brother or sister who are in the Lord. The NET version uses “fellow Christian,” which also catches the sense.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

1Jo 2:10

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

1Jo 2:11

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“walks in the darkness.”** That is, lives his life in darkness.” “Walk” here is a standard idiom for living life.

**“blinded his eyes.”** The person who walks in darkness, that is, lives in harmony with the world and goes against God’s commands, cannot see the truth, and cannot see things as they really are. We are familiar with the fact that darkness distorts images, and that happens to people who live in darkness: they cannot see the truth or the value in truth. There is a danger in ignoring God, because the more people ignore God and follow the desires of their flesh, the more hardened they become to the truth and the more they resist it and become ensnared in evil. Evil goes from bad to worse (Eph. 4:19; 2 Tim. 3:13). Christ said something similar to this in John 12:35. The person who is not born again cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14), but even Christians who walk in darkness do not see things as they really are, for example, the value of striving to be godly, and if they do not make a concerted effort to resist the Devil, they will find themselves deeply entrapped by the world’s evil systems.

1Jo 2:13

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), which BDAG describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[14]](#footnote-17148) *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun).

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

1Jo 2:14

**“Wicked One.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:13.

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

1Jo 2:16

**“desires.”** The Greek word is *epithumia* (#1939 ἐπιθυμία), and it refers to desire, usually an intense desire, and one that is often for what is forbidden. Thus, it is an intense desire, a craving, a longing. Some versions use “lust,” and while that gets the sense of the intense desire, it relegates that desire mostly to the sexual realm. Some versions read “cravings,” and that catches the sense but is an awkward reading to some.

**“pride in one’s lifestyle.”** Although many versions say “life” and not “lifestyle” or the more specific “possessions,” the Greek word *bios* refers to the external trappings of life, versus *zoe*, the internal life. The lust of the flesh and eyes are toward that which is external, and the pride of one’s lifestyle and possessions continues the thought. Cf. “τοῦ βίου *pride in one’s possessions* 1J 2:16” **(**BDAG). Also, the context is important. The previous verse (1 John 2:15) directs us to not love the things in the world, and the next verse (1 John 2:17) reminds us that this world is passing away. It is very easy to get so attached to the physical things in life that we compromise on the truth of the Word, or are “forced” by “what we need to do,” that we neglect our prayer life, fellowship life, Bible study time, and our time to just “be with God” and think about Him, His ways, and how to be more godly in life (the Bible calls it “meditate” on the things of God, but it is certainly not any type of Eastern or Yoga meditation. It is to think about, mull over, and includes verbally reciting verses).

1Jo 2:17

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

1Jo 2:18

**“the antichrist.”** The Greek text does not have the article “the” before “antichrist,” but it can be reasonably assumed from the context and scope of Scripture. There were prophecies in the Old Testament about one who would come and be firmly against God and the people of God (cf. Dan. 9:26-27). The Devil has had people in every generation who are ready to step into that role because he does not know when Jesus is coming back and when the last times and Great Tribulation will start.

1Jo 2:19

**“*and* so.”** The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause (that is, the preposition hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood; cf. the translation of NIV, NRSV, NAB, which show result).

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

These false believers had no purpose in mind when they left. They did not intend on showing that they did not truly belong, as some translations imply, e.g., “*they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us” (NASB1995). Rather, the revelation that they were not true believers was merely the result of their going out: “their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (NIV).

1Jo 2:20

**“all of you know.”** The reading of the KJV and ASV versions, “You know all things” is based on a Greek text not considered original. The Greek text was changed from *oidate pantes* (“you all know”) to *oidate panta* (“you all know all things”), which changed the Greek word for “all” from the subject of the sentence to a direct object. The change most likely resulted from the lack of a direct object for the verb in the original reading.[[15]](#footnote-31570) What we are said “to know” is left unspecified because it refers in general to what is “known” in the context; in verse 18 we “know it is the last hour” because of all those who are antichrist. In verse 21, John goes on to say, “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.”

The Greek phrase (*oidates pantes*) literally means “you all know” (cf. NASB, NET), but the verb *oida* has no object and could imply either an ellipsis, “you all know *the truth*” (cf. NIV, NLT), which is paralleled in 1 John 2:21, or it could function substantively as a noun, “you all have knowledge” (cf. ESV, HCSB, NAB, NRSV). The idea for the translation, “you know the truth” comes from the following verses, for example, 1 John 2:21, which says, “you know it” (the truth). Furthermore, the “truth” in question is mainly about Jesus Christ: that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22).

1Jo 2:22

**“the one who denies the Father and the Son.”** This is one of the verses that adds evidence to the fact that there is not a Trinity. If there were a Trinity, with the One God being composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are co-equal and co-eternal, then 1 John 2:22 should say, “the one who denies the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The most reasonable explanation for the “Holy Spirit” being left out of this verse (and being left out of many other places as well) is that there is no “Person” known as “the Holy Spirit.” There is one God, the Father, and one Lord, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

[For more on there not being a Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

1Jo 2:24

**“remains...remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6. The word “remains” in the first sentence is in the imperative mood, hence the exclamation point at the end of the sentence.

**“in *union with* the Son and the Father.** This use of “in union with” emphasizes the fellowship that Christians have when they live Christian lives in godliness and obedience.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

1Jo 2:27

**“remains…remain.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6. In this case, the translation “remains” is better than “lives” because the subject is the anointing, which is not alive.

1Jo 2:28

**“And now.”** This begins a summary statement.

**“remain.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6. The believer must remain in Christ in their daily walk. The NIV translates this as “continue in him,” which catches the sense very well.

**“shrink back from him in shame at his coming.”** This is a very serious warning, and one that is not taught much in the Christian world. Most Christians are taught that when they die they will go to heaven forever and have a wonderful time. They think eternity will be, as the song goes, “what a joy that will be when my Savior I shall see.” But that is not what the Bible says.

For one thing, our future will be on earth, not in heaven. That is why Jesus taught that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). At some point in the future Jesus will come down from heaven, fight the Battle of Armageddon, conquer the earth, and set up his kingdom on earth. Then he will reward people on the basis of what they have done and how they have lived (Matt. 16:27; see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

Sadly, most Christians are not taught about the verses such as 1 John 2:28 and the fact that Christians who have lived sinful and selfish lives will feel shame when they see Jesus face to face. Thus, most Christians do not take God’s commands as seriously as they should, and they are not prepared for Judgment Day. Christians need to wake up to the reality of what the Bible says about rewards and loss of rewards in the Kingdom and not get misled by all the erroneous talk of the great joy everyone will have when Jesus comes.

The Bible does not put a lot of emphasis on the shame that people who are saved but still lead purposely sinful lives will have when Christ comes because God does not want to motivate people to obey Him by fear. God wants us to obey Him because He loves us and wants the best for us. On the other hand, God does not want disobedient people to be caught off guard by what will happen on Judgment Day. He does not want anyone to be able to say, “God, you never told me about this!” God tells us about the great rewards and joy the obedient will have when Jesus comes, and also about the loss of rewards and feeling of shame the disobedient will have. So the facts are open to us, and now it is up to each person to decide how they want to live. There is some comfort for those who have lived in sin and never asked to be forgiven; the feeling of shame will not last forever; at some point in the future, even if it is in the Everlasting Kingdom at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom, there will be joy without shame for every saved person.

That people who get saved but then do not live godly lives will have shame in their future life is stated in a number of places in the Bible (cf. 1 John 2:28; Mark 8:38 (cf. Luke 9:26); Ezek. 16:61-63; 20:41-43; 44:10-13).

**1 John Chapter 3**

1Jo 3:1

**“children of God.”** The Christian is a child of God by birth, which is an honor and blessing beyond description. When a person believed (Rom. 10:9), they got born again and received the gift of holy spirit (Eph. 1:13), which comes with power (Acts 1:8). It also enables us to be in intimate contact with God and the Lord Jesus, so that we can walk by the spirit, guided by Christ.

It is sometimes taught that becoming a child of God means one’s salvation is irrevocable, but that is not the case. Being a child of God never changes—once a child, always a child. However, the assumption that sometimes comes along with the doctrine of the New Birth is that children of God automatically have everlasting life, and that is not correct. The first “sons of God” were angels (cf. Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps. 89:6), but when they sinned they were cast into prison and are awaiting judgment and destruction (2 Peter 2:4; Matt. 25:41). The New Birth gives us lots of advantages over anyone who does not have holy spirit, but it does not guarantee everlasting life.

It is also important to realize that the “birth” in the concept of “new birth” is not actual birth, but rather an act of creation. The “new birth” is a metaphor to help Christians realize the intimacy of the relationship between them and God. There was no actual “birth” because there was no mother, no pregnancy, and no actual “birth.” That the “new birth” is a metaphor can be seen because the Bible also says we are “adopted” into God’s family. If “birth” were literal, then Christians could not also be adopted, or if adoption were literal, then the “birth” could not be. The fact is that neither birth nor adoption is literal; both are metaphors that communicate facts about our relationship with God, such as intimacy and intra-family relationships. What clearly seems to be true is that our new relationship with God is tied to His putting (“creating”) the gift of holy spirit in Christians that gives them a new nature and makes them “holy ones.”

1Jo 3:2

**“has not yet been revealed.”** The Greek verb is *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερόω), and it means to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, make visible, realized, expose to view, appear. The verb in the Greek is in the third-person singular, and can be either “he,” “she,” or “it.” The context, and the sentence, favor “it.” The first time *phaneroō* appears in the verse, it is referring to the fact that what we will be, our new glorified bodies, has not yet been revealed. The second refers to the same thing: the revealing of our new bodies. The subject has not changed to the revealing of Christ. Reading the sentence as it appears in the REV (cf. NAB, NET, DBY), “We know that when it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is,” makes perfect sense. The question is what our new bodies will be like, which has not yet been revealed. What they will be like will be revealed, however, by seeing what Christ looks like, because our new bodies “will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). We “know” that our new bodies will be like his, “because” we will be able to see him as he is in his new body, so the fact will be obvious. On the other hand, if the more standard reading is assumed to be correct, the sentence does not make good sense: “But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” How does seeing Christ as he is give us confidence that we will be like him? Many people will see Christ, in fact, the nations will mourn at his second coming, but that does not mean they will be like him.

Many competent Greek scholars have seen that the phrase usually translated “when he appears” (more properly, “when he is revealed”) should actually be “when it [our new body] is revealed.”[[16]](#footnote-17230)

**“We know that.”** We can “know” that we will be like Jesus because God does not lie and the Bible can be trusted. The Bible has several verses that say we can “know” about the future salvation that believers will receive (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1, 5-6; Phil. 1:6; 1 John 3:2; 5:13).

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on our new, divine nature, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4.]

1Jo 3:3

**“*based* upon him.”** The hope referred to in this verse flows from the immediate context of Christ’s appearing and our new bodies. The Greek text more literally says that this hope is said to be “upon him,” that is, Christ; as Lenski has written, “set or resting ‘on him’ as the One who will fulfill this hope for us.”[[17]](#footnote-27538) This verse is not saying, “Whoever has this hope in himself,” as the more ambiguous KJV, NRSV, and NIV rendering could imply. If the wording, “has this hope in him” is going to be used as a translation, there should also be some way to communicate that the text is saying, “has this hope in him (i.e., in Jesus),” and not “in him (i.e., himself).” It is the same Greek phrase, *ep’ autō*, that appears in Romans 15:12, “… in him [Christ] the Gentiles will hope ” (See also: Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:6).

From the previous verse (1 John 3:2), we see that having *this hope* (the hope of our new bodies, which will look like Christ’s) causes us to purify ourselves, even as he is pure; this is because the prospect of being like Christ physically should induce in us the desire to be like him morally as well (See 1 John 4:17).

1Jo 3:4

**“sin is lawlessness.”** God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and the author and standard of what is “truth” and “right.” For there to be order in the universe and in society, there have to be standards. God sets many standards in society that allow people to live godly lives and be a blessing to themselves and others. It is the nature of the Devil to reject God’s laws and make up his own, but that results in people suffering. For example, God says not to lie. The Devil is a liar, but his “freedom,” (actually, lawlessness) results in people being hurt. All lawlessness goes against the very fabric of God’s creation, and is sin.

1Jo 3:6

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“does not continue sinning.”** Every human commits sin, and in fact, commits sin quite regularly (cf. 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36; Ecc. 7:20). So it is obvious from the scope of Scripture that this verse is not literally saying a Christian “does not continue sinning.” We get from the context of 1 John what verses such as 1 John 3:6 and 3:9 are saying. In these verses, the Greek is generally clearer than the English, but it is challenging to translate it into English.

In 1 John 3:6-9, the word “sin,” when it is a verb, is an active verb in the present tense, and so is the Greek verb *poieō* (“to do, to make”). The impact of this is important. For example, it misses the point of the Greek to believe, “He who commits sin is of the Devil,” (1 John 3:8 RSV), as if committing a sin made a person of the Devil, because, as stated above, we all sin. In this context, the Greek active present tense means: “He who keeps committing sin,” or “He who makes a practice of sin,” or “He who continually commits sin.” The Devil makes a habitual practice of committing sin, and those who do the same are of the Devil.

We get a better idea of what “continues sinning” in 1 John 3:6 means by contrasting it with the next verse, 1 John 3:7, and we get a better sense of what 1 John 3:9 is saying by contrasting it with 1 John 3:10. 1 John 3:6 says the person who remains in God does not “continue sinning,” i.e., continue in deliberate and purposeful sin, while the person who does not know God does continue, continually practice, in that kind of sin. Then the next verse, verse 7, says that righteous people “practice righteousness.” Then the same basic ideas are repeated in 1 John 3:9 and 3:10. Verse 9 says the person who is born of God does not, indeed, cannot, continue in sin, i.e., deliberate and purposeful sin, while in contrast, 1 John 3:10 points out that the people who are of the Devil do not continue in, or “practice” righteous behavior.

Although there may be some exceptions to the rule, generally, children of God will behave righteously, while people who reject God will behave unrighteously. Knowing this can be a big help to Christians who are trying to figure out “who’s who” in the world around them and align themselves with godly people. Indeed, the Bible tells us, “This is how the children of God and the children of the Devil are revealed” (1 John 3:10), by their actions, their fruit (cf. Matt. 7:15-20).

1Jo 3:8

**“continues to commit sin.”** See commentary on 1 John 3:6.

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“has been sinning”** There are some people who say the Devil can only do what God allows him to do, but this verse disproves that argument. By definition, sin is “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4); sin is not keeping God’s laws. But if the Devil is only doing what God allows him to do (some people would even go so far as to say that the Devil actually does only what God wants him to do), then the Devil is not “sinning.”

God is at war with the Devil, and the Devil has free will and sins against God and His creation. To say “the Devil can only do what God wants him to do” gives us humans more power than the Devil because people do not ask God if they can sin before they sin. No person asks God if he can steal before he steals; lie before he lies, or murder before he murders. People do those sinful things as a free will choice without God’s permission. God tells us many times in the Bible, in many different ways, to obey Him, but people regularly ignore what God says; so does the Devil.

The word for “sinning” in this verse is in the present tense, though it is translated as the perfect tense in English: “has been sinning.” This is because this is an instance of what Wallace’s Grammar calls the Present of Past Action Still in Progress, or the Extending-from-Past Present.[[18]](#footnote-10450) In Greek, this is a way of showing that the action started in the past and is continuing on in the present. The Devil started sinning from the beginning and is still sinning in the present. This is how the children of the Devil are also; they were sinning in the past and have continued sinning into the present. In English we do not use the present tense, as the Greeks did, to convey this concept. We would not say, “The fire burns since yesterday,” but “the fire has been burning since yesterday.”

Another thing this verse indicates is that the Devil, like every other unsaved being, will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire. The wages of sin is death, and every unatoned sinner will die in the Lake of Fire, and that includes the Devil. It may take “to the ages of the ages,” but eventually even the Devil will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“from the beginning.”** The “beginning” here in 1 John 3:8 is a general reference to the beginning of sin, which was before God created humankind. To our knowledge, the Devil was the very first sinner. According to Ezekiel 28:15-16, the spirit being we now call the Devil was “blameless” until unrighteousness was discovered in him. At that point, he was ejected from the holy mountain of God where the ruling assembly of spirits met. He became an adversary to God and led Adam and Eve into sin, the effects of which all the earth is experiencing.

**“destroy.”** The Greek word is *luō* (#3089 λύω), and it can mean to destroy or abolish, but also to undo, loose, untangle, and set free. Jesus came to do both, in our lives now, and ultimately, when the Kingdom comes into fruition. Many of the works of the Devil he will destroy and abolish, such as pornography, but with other situations he will have to simply untangle the Devil’s twisted perversion of things, setting them free to be how God envisioned them. In this latter case, Christ will not totally abolish these things, like the publishing industry, for instance, perhaps there will still be books in the Kingdom, but will redeem them from their bondage as tools for Satan’s schemes.

1Jo 3:9

**“born of God.”** This refers to the New Birth. See commentary on 1 Peter 1:3.

**“continue to commit sin.”** See commentary on 1 John 3:6.

**“his seed remains in him.”** God’s “seed” here in 1 John 3:9 is the gift of holy spirit, which is created in the Christian the moment they confess and believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). The “seed,” the gift of holy spirit, is created in the person, which is partly why the person is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and it gives the person a new, holy, divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

[For more on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on the holy nature of the Christian, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4. For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

1Jo 3:10

**“the Devil.”** See commentary on 1 John 3:8.

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

1Jo 3:11

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

1Jo 3:12

**“*and* not be like Cain, who was *born* of the Wicked One.”** Cain had committed the unforgivable sin and was a child of the Devil. He manifested the nature of his father and was a liar and murderer (John 8:44).

[For more on the unforgivable sin, see commentary on Matt. 12:31; Gen. 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15. For still more on the children of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil,” under “Belial” and “Father.”]

**“Wicked One.”** The Devil. For more on the term Wicked One, see commentary on 1 John 2:13.

**“slaughtered.”** There are several Greek words for kill or murder. God could have used any of these other words (e.g., ἀποκτείνω, ἀναιρέω, διαξειρίζομαι, φονεύω) but went out of his way to employ *sphazō* (#4969 σφάζω), a word used primarily of animals being sacrificed. *Sphazō* described the Greeks’ ritual sacrifices, when they would slice open the animal’s throat and pour its blood into a bowl. From this, the word came to be used of human murder that was particularly brutal or bloody. It is appropriate, then, here for the story of Cain and Abel, which has to do with both sacrifices offered and Abel’s spilled blood.

The only other occurrences of *sphazō* are in the book of Revelation. The souls of the saints who were slaughtered on account of their witness appear under the altar, the place for slaughtering sacrifices (Rev. 6:9; cf. Rev. 18:24); Christ is depicted as a Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8); one of the Beast’s heads was slaughtered, but recovered (Rev. 13:3); and people are made to murder each other when peace is taken from the earth (Rev. 6:4).

1Jo 3:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“if the world hates you.”** In both Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large number of meanings. Although in this context the primary meaning is to have an intense dislike for, and even hostility toward, it certainly includes the meanings of reject or ignore.

[For more on the meanings of “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

1Jo 3:14

**“Whoever does not love​.”** The Greek text of this sentence does not have an object, but many Western texts added the word for “brother” to this sentence to clarify it, which explains why the KJV and some other older versions have the word “brother” in the sentence. (For more information on the addition of “brother,” see Metzger.)[[19]](#footnote-18909)

**“our brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word “brothers” can include both Christian brothers and sisters, and it does here (see Word Study: “Adelphos.”). This is one of the many verses that show we are to show special love to fellow Christians. See commentary on John 13:34.

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“in death.”** The Bible speaks of being “in God” or “in Christ” (remaining “in him,” e.g., 1 John 3:6, 9). In this case, “in death” is referring to the sphere or realm of death versus the realm or sphere of life. People who were in the state of death have crossed over to the sphere of life if you love the brothers and sisters in the Lord. Those are the two states: “in life” and “in death.” For those who do not love, they remain “in death.”

1Jo 3:15

**“Everyone who keeps on hating.”** The person who hates his fellow man is a murderer in God’s sight. In this context, “hate” is being used as active ill will or indifference toward someone; it involves hatred, rejection, and abhorrence; it is not just an emotion, it is an emotion coupled with action. It would also mean the person would be completely indifferent toward the one he hates, and unwilling to help even in dire circumstances. A person who hates that deeply would murder, just like Cain murdered Abel, if he had the opportunity and was not afraid of the consequences.

However, to fully understand what God is saying here requires that we understand the deep connection between the physical and spiritual world. Hatred and murder start in the heart of the Devil and then are promulgated on earth, first by his followers (John 8:44), and then by those who ignore God’s commands and follow their own desires. The person who hates cannot pretend that his hatred does not move things to be against the person he hates, certainly in the spirit world and sometimes also in the physical world. He will think, speak, and act against that person, all of which have consequences. Furthermore, does a person have to commit physical murder to be a murderer? The way Jesus spoke of adultery, he does not. A man who desired to commit adultery with a woman “has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Similarly, a person who hates has already committed murder in his heart, and thus is a murderer. There is no excuse for a Christian to harbor hatred in his heart. It is sin, and we should love God and our brothers and sisters enough to at least have Christian love for them; as Jesus taught, let us love our enemies.

**“his brother or sister.”** In the immediate context, “brother” refers to a physical brother (1 John 3:12; Cain killed his brother Abel), and also a “brother” in the Faith (1 John 3:13; fellow Christians are “brothers”). The hatred and strife among the Christian brotherhood may have indeed been John’s pressing concern in writing this verse: apparently many people were walking in darkness, there were false prophets speaking to the believers (1 John 4:1), and even some antichrists had gone out from the fellowship (1 John 2:18-19). Nevertheless, to confine this verse to just the Christian brotherhood restricts it too much. In this case, the truth that applies to the Christian brotherhood applies to all mankind as well. The one who hates his fellow man is a murderer, whether those people are Christian or not.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. The person who hates at the level intended by John here in 1 John 3:15 has ignored the love of God and the love of Christ and has turned away from their way of loving and living life. The person who hates at that level has rejected Christ’s attempts to change their heart and decided to live life by his own rules. That is why the person will not attain life in the age to come (see commentary on Gal. 5:21).

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

1Jo 3:16

**“life…lives.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**“for us.”** This phrase comes from the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “on behalf of” (with the genitive, *hēmōn* means “us”), and can also mean “instead of.”[[20]](#footnote-22620) Christ died *for us*, that is, *on our behalf*; he took our place and died *instead* of us, when we were the ones who deserved the punishment of death.

**“obligated.”** This word, from the Greek *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλώ), designates an “*obligation*; as *debt*; that which one ought to do, *duty.*”[[21]](#footnote-30805) It is used to describe monetary debts, duty to fulfill oaths, and other moral and social obligations. The Greek term means much more than is communicated when English versions translate the word as “ought to.” Though “ought” technically denotes a duty or obligation, it is used colloquially to express something that one “ought” to do but has no real honorific duty to do. For instance, we might say, “I really ought to mow the lawn this weekend,” which means I should do it, but I’m probably not going to. Nor do I feel any sense of moral obligation to mow the lawn; it’s just something that would be good to do. This is not at all the sense of *opheilō*. Rather, this word points to something that one is obligated to do.

**“lives.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή), meaning soul. It is used as metonymy for the whole person’s being and not just their physical life. If need be, we must face physical danger to the point of death, on behalf of our brothers. But this verse speaks of much more than that; it speaks of the “laying down our lives,” which does not refer to our dying but to living sacrificially every day for others, especially those in the household. In this way, it parallels Romans 12:1, although in a horizontal and not vertical way. Christ did much more for us than simply die a physical death; he lived, and lives, in such a way as to pour out himself for us. And we are obligated to do the same.

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

1Jo 3:17

**“material possessions.”** The Greek literally reads, “the goods of the world.” One of the meanings of the Greek word *bios*, which is translated as “goods,” is “resources needed to maintain life” (BDAG). And so, in this context, *bios* refers to the means to sustain life, i.e., the material things that are involved in sustaining life.

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“heart.”** The Greek text literally reads “bowels,” and can be translated as, “sees his brother in need but shuts up his bowels from him.” The bowels were viewed as the center of a person’s emotional life. What John is saying is that if a person has material possessions that would allow them to help someone in need but they stifle their feelings of compassion and do not help, how can they have the love of God? The verse expresses the feeling of compassion by using the word “bowels,” but in our modern expression would refer to the “heart” of a person. It is obvious a literal translation would not communicate to a modern reader and only be confusing. The word “bowels” refers to one’s feelings and affection, and the word “heart” is used to convey that meaning.

[For more on “bowels,” see commentary on Phil. 1:8.]

1Jo 3:18

**“*only...also*.”** The words “only” and “also” are clearly implied in the context. The Bible is not telling us that we should abstain from loving people with our words. We are to love with both words and deeds. If we are going to love like Jesus did, we have to love with what we say and do (cf. Luke 24:19). Jesus’ words were powerful and loving, and so were his actions. Moses also was mighty in words and actions and is a good example for us (Acts 7:22).

Some commentators, rather than thinking that we need to love in both word and deed, think that in this context, “word” refers to idle, meaningless talk in contrast to action.[[22]](#footnote-31935) But that requires adding to the text just as adding the words “only” and “also” does. Furthermore, while it is certainly true that God does not consider it acting with “love” to engage in idle talk, expressing that in this case would make the verse difficult, because it would be tantamount to saying, “let us not love in idle talk;” but idle talk is not a form of loving “with words.” It is much better, especially given the idiomatic language that sometimes appears in the Bible, to add “only” and “also,” to clarify John’s meaning in the verse. The verse could be left without the addition of “only” and “also,” but that is somewhat problematic for a couple of reasons. The first is that it can mislead readers into thinking we should not work to be loving with our words, which the verse is clearly not saying: in fact, in our culture we need to strive to be very loving with our words. Also, given the common idiomatic use of the language of the Bible, there is no problem adding the words “only” and “also” for clarity. The people of the Bible times were more used to the idiom and did not require as much clarification.

The reason John used the idiom here in 1 John 3:18 was to deemphasize the use of words and emphasize the need for action, because the problem he was addressing was that people were only “loving” with words. But idioms can sometimes be confusing and need clarification. The addition of “only” and “also” are gained from the scope of Scripture and the knowledge of the biblical culture and customs. Besides this example in 1 John 3:18, another good example of this idiom is Jesus’ statement, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life….” (John 6:27 ESV). Of course, Jesus is not saying we should stop working for our daily food, everyone knows we need to work to eat. But his use of the idiomatic language emphasizes the fact that we should be working to gain everlasting life by deemphasizing our working for daily bread.

Exodus 16:8 is another example of this idiomatic way of speaking. Moses said to the Israelites, “Your murmurings are not against us [Moses and Aaron] but against Yahweh.” But the Bible had just made it clear that the Israelites were indeed murmuring against Moses and Aaron, and nothing was said about them murmuring against God: “The whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron” (Exod. 16:2). Thus, in that context, we can rightly add the words “only” and “also,” so that the verse reads more clearly: “Your murmurings are not against us *only*, but *also* against Yahweh.” The idiomatic language downplays the rejection of Moses and Aaron, and emphasizes the rejection of God.

1 Samuel 8:7 is similar to Exodus 16:8, but involves God and Samuel. God said to Samuel, “they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me.” But it is clear from 1 Samuel 8:5 and 8:8 that the Israelites had rejected Samuel, and so the text could rightly be worded, “they have not rejected you *only*, but they have *also* rejected me.” 1 Samuel 8:7 is worded the way it is to deemphasize Samuel and magnify the people’s rejection of God.

Jesus spoke basically the same way in Mark 9:37 when he said, “whoever receives me, receives not me, but the one who sent me.” Since Jesus had just made it plain that the people did receive him, the text is understood to mean, “whoever receives me, does not receive *only* me, but *also* the one who sent me.” But Jesus’ wording emphasized the Father and deemphasized him (cf. John 12:44). In 1 Cor. 15:10, Paul deemphasized his efforts and magnified the grace of God.

Joel 2:13 says, “Tear your hearts, and not your garments.” In this verse, God is calling for Israel to actually repent of their evil deeds and not just have an outward religious show of piety by tearing their clothes. But tearing one’s clothes was a meaningful expression of anguish and humility before the Lord. In Jeremiah 36:24, God is amazed that the people could burn up the scroll of His words and be so hard-hearted they did not tear their garments, unlike the many great people of God who tore their garments in difficult and dire times (cf. Gen. 37:34; Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 13:19, 31; 2 Kings 2:12; 19:1; Ezra 9:3; Esther 4:1). It is appropriate to both repent in the heart and have an outward sign of that repentance such as torn clothing, and so the verse could well read: “Tear your hearts also, and not just your garments.” But without genuine repentance, the outward show is just a lie. So there is no need for the longer reading if we understand the custom. Given our understanding of the biblical idiom, we should be aware that God wants us to love with our words and with our actions.

**“in truth and action.”** The Greek text literally reads “in deed and truth” with the preposition *en* governing both singular objects. That is, in accord with the Word of God and revelation from the Lord. Humans do not define love, God defines love, and for love to be genuinely love, and not people calling evil “good,” and good “evil,” we must understand that any “love” we show must agree with God’s idea of love.

1Jo 3:19

**“set our hearts at ease.”** This verb becomes very interesting in this context. It comes from the Greek word *peithō* (#3982 πείθω), which usually means persuade or convince (e.g. Acts. 18:4; 19:8), or “to be so convinced that one puts confidence in something.”[[23]](#footnote-19793) In this context, however, it has the meaning of “set at ease,” “to pacify.” We gently reason with our hearts and persuade them to be at ease and have confidence before God. Louw-Nida writes that the phrase “to convince the heart” is an idiom, meaning “to exhibit confidence and assurance in a situation which might otherwise cause dismay or fear.” (25.166). By what means do we assure our hearts? “By this” we assure our hearts: laying down our lives for the brothers (1 John 3:16), not closing our bowels of compassion (1 John 3:17), loving one another in deed and truth (1 John 3:18), and obeying his commandments (1 John 3:22-23). Living according to God’s will sets our hearts at ease before him and gives us confidence for prayer and assurance for the Judgment. Yet, if our heart does condemn us, God is still greater than our hearts (1 John 3:20), though we may not have confidence in this case. (See commentary on 1 John 4:17, “brought to its goal with us”).

1Jo 3:22

**“ask…receive…keep…do.”** All the verbs in this verse are in the present tense. We take these to be the usages of the iterative and customary present tenses.[[24]](#footnote-29218) The first two verbs are iterative, that is, they display actions that repeatedly happen—like the boy who “often falls into the fire” (Matt. 17:15), the word “falls” is an iterative use of the present tense. We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). This is why Matthew 7:7 also uses the iterative present, as Wallace writes, “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly… knock continuously, over and over again.”[[25]](#footnote-18681) When we keep asking, we keep receiving the things we ask for.

But just asking is not enough; it should be coupled with obedience. Hence, the verse says we receive our prayers *because* we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing to him. The words for “keep” (his commandments) and “do” are customary presents, meaning they indicate a habitual, or regularly occurring, action. This verse is teaching us that a key to getting our prayers answered is, praying continuously and making it our customary practice to obey God, to do what is pleasing to him. Although we certainly do not have to be “sinless” for God to answer us, there are ungodly behaviors that can hinder our prayers (Josh. 7:10-11; Ps. 34:15-17; 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Mark 11:25; James 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:7).

1Jo 3:23

**“in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”** We are not commanded here to believe in *Jesus*, nor simply believe that he is *Christ*, but to believe *in the name* of his son Jesus Christ. Believing on “the name” of someone is an idiom where that person’s name is taken to represent the totality of who that person is: his notoriety, authority, influence, all he stands for, and the respect due him. It is similar to the English phrase, “Stop, in the name of the Law!” where the “law’s” name is invoked to represent its authority. It is not enough to believe that a man with the name “Jesus” really existed. Believing on his name is much more than this; it requires trust in what he represents and submission to his authority as the son of God and Messiah. It is this kind of believing we are required to have, the believing that is *on his name*. As Vincent writes concerning John 1:12, the phrase “expresses the sum of the qualities which mark the nature or character of a person. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, is to accept as true the revelation contained in that title.”[[26]](#footnote-18457)

[For some other instances where name signifies one’s notoriety see: John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 20:31; for instances when the name means the person see: Num. 1:2, 18, 20; 3:40, 43; 26:53; Acts 1:15.]

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

1Jo 3:24

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

**“in *union with* him.** This use of “in union with” is similar to the use of the phrase in 1 John 2:24, and emphasizes the fellowship that Christians have when they live Christian lives in godliness and obedience.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

**“that he gave to us.”** We have translated the relative pronoun to be impersonal, “that,” (NRSV, NAB) rather than “whom” (ESV, NASB). Although the Trinitarian interpretation, which makes the pronoun personal, is grammatically possible, that is not the way the pronoun should be understood here. Rather than referring to a person being given to us (the third person of the Trinity), this verse is speaking of the gift of holy spirit given to the believer upon New Birth (Joel 2:28-29; Luke 11:13; John 7:39; Acts 2:4, 38; 8:15-19; 10:45; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). See also commentary on 1 John 4:13; “of his spirit.”[[27]](#footnote-20421)

**1 John Chapter 4**

1Jo 4:1

**“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.”** The Greek word translated “spirit” (and “spirits”) is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), and this is the same use of “spirit” that is found in 1 Corinthians 14:12, 32 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and Isaiah 11:4. It is a metonymy, with the word “spirit” being put for the manifestations of holy spirit which are spoken by the power of holy spirit. In other words, that which is spoken by the power of holy spirit is called a “spirit” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12).

In this case, the context makes it clear that “spirit” is a metonymy for a message spoken by “spirit.” The Christian is not to believe every “spirit,” i.e., every prophecy and spiritual utterance, but test them to see if they are from God because many “false prophets” have gone out into the world. The next verse continues the thought: every prophecy that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, while those prophecies that do not are not from God.

This verse parallels 1 Thess. 5:20-21, which say not to treat prophecies with contempt, but to test them and then hold on to the ones that are “good,” that is, accurate and from the Lord.

The beauty of the metonymy is that it leaves the door open for primary meanings and secondary meanings to both be present, which is the case in this verse. Although the context is prophets and thus the primary meaning of “spirits” is prophecies, it is also true that the prophecies have a “spirit” generating them, and part of discerning the prophecies is discerning the spiritual power that is generating them and whether it is the holy spirit of God or a demon.

1Jo 4:2

**“every spirit.”** This is primarily referring to prophecies, but is also looking “behind the curtain” at the spirit (gift of holy spirit or demon) that is producing the prophecy. See commentary on 1 John 4:1.

**“confesses.”** The Greek is *homologeō* (#3670 ὁμολογέω), and can mean “confess,” “profess,” “declare,” “acknowledge.” Here, “acknowledge” captures the meaning of the word which is demonstrated by confession. True prophecy confesses Jesus and thus acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh.

**“from God.”** The Greek is “of God,” and is a genitive of origin, thus “from God” is proper, likewise in 1 John 4:3.

1Jo 4:3

**“every spirit.”** This is primarily referring to prophecies, but is also looking “behind the curtain” at the spirit (gift of holy spirit or demon) that is producing the prophecy. See commentary on 1 John 4:1.

**“not from God.”** The Greek is “of God,” and is a genitive of origin, thus “from God” is proper.

1Jo 4:4

**“have overcome.”** This verb, *nikaō* (#3528 νικάω), is in the perfect tense, portraying the action as completed, we *have* overcome them (those who are of the spirit of error, of the world, and of antichrist, (1 John 4:3, 5-6)). The key to this victory is laid out in 1 John 5:4-5; an examination of the tenses used in these verses is very revealing: The one who has been born of God (past tense) overcomes (present tense) the world, and our saving faith is the victory that has overcome (past tense) the world. The one overcoming the world (present tense) is he who believes (present tense) in Jesus as the Son of God. Hence, our faith in Jesus, by which we were born of God, secured the victory that has overcome the world. In this sense the victory is past. It is portrayed as finished, the victory is won for us once we have this faith and are born of God. On the other hand, the overcoming is also presently unfolding, after our New Birth and our believing in Christ as the Son of God. In essence, our saving faith has secured for us the victory that is being lived out until its fruition. We have been transferred to the winning team, and it is impossible for the losers to catch up—though they may score some points against us. Victory is ours but the game is nevertheless still being played until the clock runs out. In a like manner, our overcoming the world is both a past reality and a present progression.

1Jo 4:5

**“from the world… from the world’s *perspective*.”** Commentators seem to be in agreement that these two phrases are both genitives of origin.[[28]](#footnote-12382) They are “of the world” and not “of God” (1 John 4:2-3) and the things they speak come out from the world that they originate in; hence the world listens to them. Williams’ translation captures the genitives this way: “They are *children* of the world; this is why they speak what *the world inspires*, and why the world listens to them” (emphasis added).

1Jo 4:7

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

1Jo 4:9

**“God has sent his only begotten Son.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“so that we could live through him.”** Although the primary meaning of “live” in this context is “live forever,” there is also the undertone meaning of live this life to the fullest. Christ said that he came so that people could have an abundant life, that is, one that is rich physically and spiritually (John 10:10).

1Jo 4:10

**“sent his son.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“atoning sacrifice.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:2.

1Jo 4:11

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

1Jo 4:12

**“love one another.”** See commentary on 1 John 4:11.

**“reached its goal.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:5.

1Jo 4:13

**“of his spirit.”** In the Greek this phrase uses the preposition *ek* (#1537 ἐκ), meaning “from” or “out of,” with the word “spirit” in the genitive case (*pneumatos*); literally it would read, “He gave from [out of] his spirit.” This is called the “partitive use of *ek,*” which signifies a part of some greater whole.[[29]](#footnote-27550) In this case, God has the totality of spirit and gives us some of it.

1Jo 4:14

**“the Father has sent the Son.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

**“Savior of the world.”** The term “Savior of the world” (*soter tou kosmou*) was used by the Romans to refer to the emperor. This was a national phenomenon meant to bring the empire together under a unifying religious banner by participation in the cult of the emperor.[[30]](#footnote-12036) Here, Christ is proclaimed as the true “Savior of the world” sent by God. Accordingly, early Christians refused to participate in the cult of the emperor and were heavily persecuted. Christians need boldness to stand against what is wrong, even when the entire culture thinks it is right, even when it goes against the highest of earthly authorities, and even when it will cost us greatly. John wrote the truth, that Christ is the true Savior and the emperor is an erroneous parody; we also must stand against erroneous doctrines of the world and preach the truth of Christ.

1Jo 4:15

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

1Jo 4:16

**“remains.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

1Jo 4:17

**“reached its goal with *regard to* us.”** 1 John 4:16-18 expounds upon what is mentioned in 1 John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” In verse 16 we see that God is love and hence it is by abiding in him that love is completed, brought to its goal, along with us. In this case, the end goal of love is to cast out fear of punishment, so we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment (v.18). Love has come to its intended purpose by our walking with God (who is love) now in this life. The perfect love that verse 18 is speaking of is the love brought to its “goal” in verse 17; they are both the same Greek word *teleioō* (#5048 τελειόω). By remaining in love we remain with God, and so we can have boldness in the Day of Judgment when we stand before Him, because we have been in communion with Him all along.

[See commentary on 1 John 2:5 for further explanation.]

**“confidence.”** The word can also mean “boldness,” but here the emphasis is on confidence, and it is contrasted with fear of punishment. When love is perfected in a person, that one has *parrēsia* (#3954 παρρησία; confidence, boldness, frankness of speech) in the Day of Judgment.

**“Day of Judgment.”** Each person who has ever lived will one day face God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and be judged. Most people either deny this or ignore it. Those who understand it “fear God,” in a truly godly sense, being fully aware of the seriousness of it.

**“because as he is, *so* also are we, *although still* in this world.”** As Jesus is now, so are we (righteous before God, holy, justified), although we are in this world. In other words, being in this world does not affect our righteous standing before God.[[31]](#footnote-18836)

1Jo 4:18

**“fear.”** This “fear” refers to “bad fear,” which we explain below. A fundamental teaching of the Bible is that we are to “fear God,” that is, have a healthy fear of the consequences of disobeying Him. New Testament verses that teach us to fear God (or Jesus Christ) include: Acts 10:35; Romans 11:20; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:22; 1 Peter 1:17, Revelation 11:18; 14:7 and 19:5. Jesus taught us not to fear people, who can only kill the body, but to fear God, who can destroy us totally in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28).

But how are we to “fear God” and “love God” when there is no fear in love? The answer to that apparent dilemma is that biblically, although “fear” has a range of meanings, they fall into two basic categories. The Bible lets us know (and the field of psychology empirically verifies it) that there are two kinds of fear: “good fear” and “bad fear.”

A good fear is God-given or a learned fear that keeps us safe in life. “Good fear” is God-given, and some of it is even innate and is observed in babies who have not yet “learned to fear.” Innate human fears include falling, darkness, loud and sudden noises, strange things (which is why a large percentage of babies are afraid of Santa Claus at the mall), and interestingly, snakes. In contrast to “good fear,” “bad fear” is both psychologically and physically harmful. Both “good fear” and “bad fear” occur many times in the Bible. Bad fear includes when the army of Israel was afraid of Goliath the Philistine (1 Sam. 17:11), when the Jewish people would not openly talk about Jesus because they were afraid of the rulers of the Jews (John 7:13), and people being afraid of death (Heb. 2:15).

“Good fear” serves as a warning system that keeps us out of trouble. It is important to understand, however, that “good fear” can become a bad thing if we do not move beyond it rather quickly. Good fear is designed to help us, not to keep us perpetually on edge. As we grow and understand the things we are “afraid of,” we manage our good fear and it blends with “respect” and “awe.” So, for example, what started in our young life as a fear of fire (and Mom and Dad sternly warning us about the danger of fire) becomes a respect for fire, and even an awe of huge fires. The proper fear of God is very helpful in the life of Christians. In the Bible, good fear includes us having the fear of God (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Matt. 10:28), and living in the fear of God (Acts 9:31).

Sometimes people teach that the “fear of God” is not really “fear,” but “respect” or “awe.” This is not actually true, although in some contexts the Hebrew or Greek word can refer more to “respect” or “awe” than fear. In Hebrew, the two most common words for “fear” are the noun *yir’ah* (#03374 יִרְאָה) and the verb form of the same word, *yare* (#03373 יָרֵא). In Greek, the common words for fear are the noun *phobos* (#5401 φόβος) and the verb form of the same word, *phobeō* (#5399 φοβέω). Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “fear” have a large semantic range that includes our English concepts of “terror, dread, fear, timidity, respect, reverence, and awe.” As we can see from that list, biblical “fear” is like our English word “fear” in that it includes both sides of the fear spectrum: “good fear” and “bad fear.”

It is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the essence of actual fear, being afraid, never left the word “fear,” even when *yare* or *phobos* were being used with the primary sense of “respect.” Why do we respect certain things, like fire, electricity, and lions? One reason is that there are genuine and often terrible consequences if the thing is not respected. It is vital to see the connection between “disrespect” and “consequences” if we are going to properly understand why “fear” has a good side and a bad side, and what it is to “fear God.” People respected the king for different reasons, but one of them was that not doing so brought severe consequences. Similarly, we “respect” God in part because it is dangerous not to. People who ignore or disobey God and His commands will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, and although we “respect” God, we never toy with Him and are aware of the consequences of not taking Him seriously.

If we expunge the meaning “fear” from the “fear of God,” and replace it with “respect” as if the meaning “respect” stood on its own, then we are misunderstanding what the Bible is saying. To be sure, there are verses where the aspect of “respect” or “awe” is a more accurate translation in a given context than “fear,” but the Bible student cannot forget that even when “respect” is the dominant idea in the context, the Hebrew or Greek word still retains the foundation of fear of consequences that yokes “respect” and “fear” together.

Here in 1 John, there is no “fear” in love, meaning that there is no bad fear in love. This verse is not contradicting Jesus’ teaching that we should have a fear of God.

**“love.”** Specifically, the Greek has the definite article, “the love,” or as Lenski, “this love.”[[32]](#footnote-20299) Which love? The love that has been perfected and is confident at the Judgment. There is no fear in that love. However, it is also a general principle that fear and love do not co-exist, and so most commentators do not translate the definite article. Meyer writes, “The thought is quite general in its character: ‘where love is, there is no fear.’”[[33]](#footnote-28102)

**“has *to do with* punishment.”** Vincent writes: “‘Torment’ is a faulty translation. The [Greek] word means, ‘punishment, penalty.’ …Note the present tense ‘has,” the punishment is present. Fear, by anticipating punishment, has it even now. The phrase, ‘hath punishment,’ indicates that the punishment is inherent in the fear. Fear carries its own punishment.”[[34]](#footnote-13352)

Fear has punishment now, in anticipation of the Day of Judgment, which is what the context is talking about (1 John 4:17). When we reach the goal of love, we do not have any fear regarding the Day of Judgment.

**“punishment.”** This particular word for punishment, *kolasis* (#2851 κόλασις ), is used only one other time in the New Testament (Matt. 25:46) for those people who are judged unrighteous at the Sheep and Goat Judgment and go “into everlasting punishment.” Those unrighteous people are thrown into the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The definition of *kolasis* is “the infliction of suffering or pain in chastisement, *punishment.*” It is due to this that the KJV goes with “torment.”

**“reached the goal of love.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:5.

1Jo 4:20

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

1Jo 4:21

**“must love.”** The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clause. See commentaries on John 13:34 and 9:3.

**“brother and sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**1 John Chapter 5**

1Jo 5:1

**“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”** Calvinists use this verse to prove that “regeneration” precedes a person believing. They teach that the person who believes (now) has already been born again, and that it would be impossible to believe now unless one had been born again. But the verse does not say what the Calvinists teach. At the very instant a person believes in Jesus, he or she is born again. The people John is addressing in 1 John (still) believed at that time (thus the present tense of “believes”) but were born again when they believed for the first time.

1Jo 5:3

**“For this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments.”** The Bible is clear that if we love God we keep His commandments. We see this command, worded slightly differently, in a number of verses (e.g. John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 1 John 5:3).

1Jo 5:4

**“everyone.”** Although the Greek pronoun here is neuter, “*pan*” (#3956 πᾶν), “The neuter is sometimes used with reference to persons if it is not the individuals but a general quality that is to be emphasized.”[[35]](#footnote-29501) In this context, John is emphasizing the general quality of these people. Everyone “who has been born of God,” overcomes the world. Thus, the neuter can, and should, appropriately be translated as “everyone,” rather than “whatever.” The only things “born of God” are people, not things, which is another reason why “everyone” is the preferred translation over “whatever.”

**“overcomes … has overcome.”** See commentary on 1 John 4:4, “have overcome.”

1Jo 5:5

**“who overcomes.”** See commentary on 1 John 4:4, “have overcome.”

1Jo 5:7

**“Indeed.”** The Greek *hoti* (#3754 ὅτι) is not being used in a causal sense here, but in the sense of “indeed,” “in fact.”[[36]](#footnote-32614) The text note in the NET First Edition says, “It is probably best, therefore, to understand this second *hoti* as…not strictly causal but inferential in sense….” Cf. H. Cassirer, *God’s New Covenant: A New Testament Translation*, which reads, “And so it is that.” Sometimes this sense of the *hoti* is left out when the Greek is translated into English, as N.T. Wright had done in *The Kingdom New Testament*, but we felt it better to have it translated.

**“there are three testifying.”** Some English versions have a shorter rendition of 1 John 5:7-8 than the King James Version does. The reason that there are different translations of these verses is that some Greek texts contain an addition that was not original, and that addition was placed into some English versions, such as the KJV. The note in the NIV Study Bible, which is well-known for its ardent belief in the Trinity, says, “The addition is not found in any Greek manuscript or NT translation prior to the sixteenth century.”

Most modern versions are translated from Greek texts without the addition. We will quote the NIV84: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.” We agree with the textual scholars and conclude from the evidence of the Greek texts that the statement that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit are “one” was added to the Word of God by men and should not be in the Bible.

There are many Trinitarian scholars who freely admit that the Greek text from which the KJV is translated was adjusted in this verse to support the Trinity. The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson, author of *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, and the multi-volume *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, writes:

At this point [1 John 5:7] the Latin Vulgate gives the words in the Textus Receptus, found in no Greek MS. save two late cursives (162 in the Vatican Library of the fifteenth century, [No.] 34 of the sixteenth century in Trinity College, Dublin). Jerome did not have it. Erasmus did not have it in his first edition, but rashly offered to insert it if a single Greek MS. had it, and [manuscript number] 34 was produced with the insertion, as if made to order. Some Latin scribe caught up Cyprian’s exegesis and wrote it on the margin of his text, and so it got into the Vulgate and finally into the Textus Receptus by the stupidity of Erasmus.”[[37]](#footnote-23699)

Robertson shows how this addition entered the text. It was a marginal note. Since all texts were hand-copied, when a scribe, copying a text, accidentally left a word or sentence out of his copy, he would place it in the margin, hoping that the next scribe would copy it back into the text. Unfortunately, scribes occasionally did not make the distinction between what a previous scribe had left out of the last copy and wrote in the margin, and marginal notes that another scribe had written in the margin to help him understand the text. Therefore, some marginal notes got copied into the text as Scripture.

Usually, textual additions are easy to spot because the “new” text will differ from all the other texts. However, there are times when people adore their theology more than the God-breathed original, and they fight for the man-made addition as if it were the original words of God. This has been the case with 1 John 5:7-8, and we applaud the honesty of the translators of modern versions who have left it out of their translations. The famous textual scholar F. F. Bruce does not even mention the addition in his commentary on 1 John.[[38]](#footnote-26901) *The International Critical Commentary* does not mention it either. The conservative commentator R. C. H. Lenski, in his 12-volume commentary on the New Testament, only mentions that it is proper to leave the addition out. He writes: “The R. V. [Revised Version] is right in not even noting in the margin the interpolation found in the A.V. [KJV].”[[39]](#footnote-20405) Henry Alford, author of *The Greek Testament*, a Greek New Testament with extensive critical notes and commentary, writes:

…OMITTED BY ALL GREEK MANUSCRIPTS previous to the beginning of the 16th century;

ALL the GREEK FATHERS (even when producing texts in support of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: as *e.g.*, by [abbreviated names of Church “fathers”] Clem Iren Hipp Dion Ath Did Bas Naz Nys Ephih Caes Chr Procl Andr Damasc (EC Thl Euthym);

ALL THE ANCIENT VERSIONS (including the Vulgate (as it came from Jerome, see below) and (though interpolated in the modern editions, the Syriac;

AND MANY LATIN FATHERS (*viz*. Novat Hil Lucif Ambr Faustin Leo Jer Aug Hesych Bede).[[40]](#footnote-23002)

With the spurious addition gone, it is clear that there is no reference to the Trinity in 1 John 5:7-8. The context is speaking of believing that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:5 and 5:10). There are three that testify that Jesus is the Son of God: the spirit that Jesus received at his baptism, the water of his baptism, and the blood that he shed.

Scripture says, “If we receive the testimony of people, the testimony of God is greater. For this is the testimony of God: that he has testified about his Son” (1 John 5:9). This verse is so true! How often people accept man’s testimony and believe what men say, but do not believe what God says. We need to accept the testimony of God that He has given about His Son, and agree with the testimony of the spirit, the water, and the blood, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

[For more information about this verse, see, B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes*, pp. 202-209. Sir Isaac Newton, *An Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture*, pp. 1-58. Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals* pp. 118-120.]

**“three.”** God required two or three witnesses in order for something to be considered the truth, so God provides them (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28).

1Jo 5:10

**“testimony… testified.”** This verse contains the figure of speech polyptoton, the repetition caused by using both the noun and verb forms for the same word.[[41]](#footnote-25459)

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

1Jo 5:11

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

1Jo 5:12

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

1Jo 5:13

**“you can know that.”** We can “know” we will be with Christ in the future because we believe in Christ, as the verse says, and we can “know” we have life in the age to come because God does not lie and His word is truth.

[For more on knowing we will be saved, see commentary on 1 John 3:2.]

1Jo 5:14

**“confidence that we have in his presence.”** Due to the strong parallel in Greek language with 1 John 3:21, this is referring to the presence of God, not the presence of Jesus Christ.

1Jo 5:16

**“If anyone sees his brother or sister committing sin that does not result in death, he should ask *God*, and he will give him life.”** 1 John 5:16 is a very confusing verse. First, the use of “committing a sin” (the Greek is “sinning a sin”) refers to sin that is continuing to go on, not to a one-time sin. The person is sinning and continuing to sin. Second, ordinarily the term “brother or sister” would refer to fellow Christians, but fellow Christians already have life, and beyond that, sinning does not annul one’s everlasting life. If it did, then no one would be saved because everyone, including every Christian, sins. So if a fellow Christian is sinning in a way that will not end in death, how is it that the prayer of another Christian will “give him life” if he or she already has life? Furthermore, we can pray for other people, and that no doubt helps them, but there is no promise anywhere else in Scripture that if a Christian prays for a sinner then God will give that person life. So this verse is problematic on several levels.

One way commentators have suggested to understand this verse is that if we pray for sinners it will often help, but that does not actually deal with the text.

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“There is sin that results in death.”** This sin that results in death is referred to as “the unforgivable sin” (Matt. 12:31-32).

[For more on the unforgivable sin, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

1Jo 5:18

**“everyone who has been born of God.”** This phrase refers to Christians, who are born of God. The next phrase, “but the One who has been born of God,” refers to Jesus Christ. Thus, the sentence reads, “We know that everyone who has been born [*gegenēmenos*] of God [i.e., the Christian] does not continue sinning, but the One who was born [*gennētheis*] of God [i.e., Christ] keeps him.” Twice this verse uses the word for “born of God,” *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω). Both instances are past tense, but the first occurrence is the perfect tense (*gegenēmenos*), equivalent to our English past tense, while the second is in the aorist tense (*gennētheis*), a snapshot of a one-time past event. This verse clearly makes a difference between two people who were born of God. Elsewhere, John always uses the perfect (past tense) to refer to Christians born of God; it would be strange to switch to the aorist in this verse. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there is no usage of this aorist form for the New Birth, but all refer to natural birth (Gal. 4:29; Heb. 11:23), like Christ’s natural birth having been fathered of God (1 John 5:1). Hence, Jesus uses this word with regard to himself in John 18:37.[[42]](#footnote-27225) John uses the aorist and perfect to distinguish two different parties in 1 John 5:1, the general Christian born of God (perfect tense) and the Father who begets (aorist tense), showing that he thinks in distinction between the two tenses.

The first person spoken of in the perfect is the general believer, as seen by this same usage in 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7 and 5:1, 4; the second person in this verse spoken of as “born of God” is Christ. Since we have established there are two different people spoken of as born of God, it makes sense that the second, aorist usage would not be another Christian, partly because Christians are always spoken of in the perfect tense by John. There is, however, a variant Greek reading that reads, “He who is born of God *keeps himself*,” placing the duty of keeping on the believer himself. Nevertheless, this reading is highly unlikely to be original.[[43]](#footnote-23359) Further, as Bart Ehrman has pointed out, “if the aorist were taken to refer to the believer, the point of the verse would be considerably muddied; no longer would it present a clear contrast between the believer who is liable to sin and Christ who keeps from sin. Now it contrasts the believer who is born of God and yet liable to sin and, presumably, the same believer who was born of God and who protects himself from sin.”[[44]](#footnote-25298) Ehrman also points out why early scribes would alter the text from “him” to “himself.” For some of the early Trinitarians, saying that Jesus was born of God was a problem, and it was much easier to have the birth refer to Christians.

It is now Christ’s job to “keep,” *tēreō* (#5083 τηρέω), the saints. We are to spur one another on to good deeds (Heb. 10:24) and turn wanderers from sin (James 5:19-20), but Christ is spoken of as the one who actually keeps the saints. In the Old Testament, God held the responsibility of keeping the Israelites (cf. Ps. 121:4-5), and Jesus prays for the Father to keep his disciples from the evil one (John 17:12, 15). After he was raised from the dead, all authority on heaven and earth was given to him and he now works with God to keep the believer (Rev. 3:10).

**“The Wicked One.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:13.

**“touch.”** The Greek is *haptomai* (#680 ἅπτω). It has two basic meanings, 1) to cause illumination or burning to take place, light, kindle (Luke 8:16; 22:55); 2) to make close contact, to touch or to take hold of; to cling to; it can also mean to partake of (2 Cor. 6:17), or to touch intimately and sexually (1 Cor. 7:1). It can also mean “to touch” in the sense of causing harm (Job 5:19; Ps. 105:15 [Ps. 104:15 in LXX]). In this verse, “touch,” meaning “harm,” is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or “demeaning,” the lessening of something in order to increase it.[[45]](#footnote-12085) The “evil one,” the Devil, harms Christians all the time. However, as Christians maintain their trust in Christ and their salvation is assured (1 Pet. 1:5), the Devil cannot harm Christians permanently. Even if the Devil kills them, they will rise from the dead like Christ did. Therefore, any harm he does is considered as nothing when compared to the everlasting future. Thus, the phrase, “the evil one does not touch him,” causes us to look at our lives from an everlasting, not temporal, perspective.

1Jo 5:19

**“the whole world lies under *the control of* the Wicked *One*.”** Many people say, “God is in control,” but that is misleading. God is the most powerful one in the universe and He will ultimately act and fulfill His plans, but He is not in control in the sense that He micromanages people or stops their free will actions. People can sin if they want to, and so can the Devil, which is why so many horrible things happen on earth. The Devil is the “Adversary,” the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), and the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and he is behind much of the evil that occurs on earth, and sinful people cause much harm and pain too. God does not cause people to sin and He cannot righteously remove people’s free will choices and thus stop their sin. People often blame God when evil things happen, but the more biblical thing is to see that evil originates from the Devil, demons, and evil or ungodly people who act in disobedience to God.

1 John 5:19 is translated differently in many versions, but most of them are close in meaning and show that the Devil has great power and influence in the world today. The ESV says, “the whole world lies in the power of the Wicked One.” The NIV says, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” The CSB says, “the whole world is under the sway of the evil one.” The NLT says, “the world around us is under the control of the evil one.”

[For information on the control of the world that Satan has, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“The Wicked One.”** See commentary on 1 John 2:13.

1Jo 5:20

**“True One.”** God, the Father, is called “the True One” in 1 John because there were so many antichrists and false teachings and pagan idols. Many people mistook those false things to be true and the truth, so John takes the time here in 1 John 5:20 to correct that erroneous thinking and refer to the true God as “the True One.”

**“and we are in *union with* the True One *by being* in *union with* his Son Jesus Christ.”** The Greek reads that we are “in” the True One, “in” His Son Jesus Christ. The evidence from the scope of Scripture leads to the conclusion that the second “in” is an instrumental dative, “by” or “by means of.” It is certainly the testimony of Scripture that we get to know God through His Son Jesus. Most versions translate and punctuate the verse so that Jesus becomes God, but that is an interpretation, not what the text says. R. C. H. Lenski, a Trinitarian, writes that this verse does not make Jesus God.

The ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ [“in the true One”] does not refer to a different person than does τὸν ἀληθινόν, namely “the real God.” The article with the dative reads like an article of previous reference. Our versions translate otherwise: “And we are in him that is true (real), even in his Son Jesus Christ.” This makes the second ἐν [“in”] phrase appositional to the first so that “the real One” in the phrase = “his Son Jesus Christ.” A comma is, therefore, placed between the ἐν phrases. If this were John’s meaning, he would have omitted αὐτοῦ, would have written: “And we are in the real One, (namely) in the Son Jesus Christ.” He wrote αὐτοῦ, the antecedent of which is τῷ ἀληθινῷ. We translate without the use of a comma: “And we are in the real One (God) in his Son Jesus Christ.”[[46]](#footnote-24134)

If we wanted to say that both the ἐν [in] in the last phrase meant the same thing, we would still have a distinction between God and Christ, and John would be saying that our relationship with each of them was important. In that case, the ἐν would be the “static ἐν” and would mean “in union with,” so the verse would read that we are “in union with the True One [God]; in union with His Son Jesus Christ.

[For more on the use of “in union with Christ,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

**“This One is the true God and life in the age *to come*.”** The question that has been hotly debated about this sentence is who is “This one” who is the true God? Is it the Father or Jesus Christ? The grammar can go either way, and each side of the argument has had its noteworthy proponents, so gathering scholars to support one’s position can be done for both positions. The argument is not settled by the nearest antecedent noun because reference to the nearest noun is not a hard-and-fast rule of Greek grammar and there are times that John, like other writers of the New Testament, does not follow it (cf. 1 John 2:22).

The evidence from Scripture is that the “true God” is the Father. The Father is called the “true God” in both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Jer. 10:10; 1 Thess. 1:9) and Jesus himself referred to the Father as the “true God” (John 17:3). Even 1 John 5:20 itself calls the Father “the True One.” In contrast, Jesus is never called the true God. There does not seem to be any good reason that the Father would be called “the True One” in contrast to the Son, but then in the very next sentence the Son be called the “True God.” That would only seem to introduce a new idea into the Epistle and be confusing. Furthermore, 1 John consistently makes a distinction between “God” and the Son, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 1:3, 7; 2:1; 4:2, 3, 9, 10, 15; 5:1, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 5:18). Jesus Christ is never referred to as God in 1 John. Thus, the evidence of Scripture is that “This one” refers to the Father.

[For more on Jesus not being God the Son, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

1Jo 5:21

**“guard yourselves from idols.”** John closes his Epistle by warning his Christian audience to guard themselves against having idols. John was not likely too worried about his readers having statues of Zeus or other Greco-Roman gods—they had turned from those pagan gods to worship the true God. However, the Roman world was full of amulets and other “protective objects” (protection from the “evil eye” was common), and it was also full of objects that supposedly brought blessings, and those things were idols. Nevertheless, those kinds of things often sneak into someone’s life because they do not really understand what an idol is and they do not think of a “protective amulet” or “lucky charm” as an idol—but they are. An idol is anything a person gives special attention to and looks to for spiritual help—help from the unseen world. Idols break the first and great commandment about having no other gods except Yahweh, and the person who turns away from God and begins to worship idols brings serious consequences upon themselves, including inviting demons into their life, because the demons crave the worship and attention being given to the idol.

[For more information on idols, see commentary on Hos. 4:12.]

1. Thayer Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἀρχή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20415)
2. Brooke and Brown pick up on this resumption of thought. See, Alan England Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles [ICC], 7; Raymond E. Brown, The Epistles of John: Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary [AB], 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-19891)
3. Metzger, Textual Commentary, xxvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-23044)
4. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 896, “anthropopatheia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16068)
5. Cf. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. [↑](#footnote-ref-10593)
6. Anderson, Sin: A History, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20539)
7. Ann Nyland, The Source New Testament, note on Col. 2:14, 389n2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26872)
8. BDAG, s.v. “ἱλασμός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11929)
9. Louw and Nida, s.v.“ ἱλασμός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29820)
10. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 996. [↑](#footnote-ref-29202)
11. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “μένω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17909)
12. Haas, deJonge, and Swellengrebel, A Translator’s Handbook on the Letters of John, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-11842)
13. Smalley, 1,2 &amp; 3 John [WBC], 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-26747)
14. BDAG, s.v. “πονηρός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17148)
15. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 709. [↑](#footnote-ref-31570)
16. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6:220-21; Marvin R. Vincent, Vincent’s Word Studies, 2:344; Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies: 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, and Jude, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-17230)
17. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-27538)
18. Wallace, Greek Grammar, 519-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-10450)
19. Bruce Metzger, Textual Commentary, 711. [↑](#footnote-ref-18909)
20. Robertson, Grammar, 630-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-22620)
21. BDAG, s.v. “ὀφείλώ.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30805)
22. Cf. John Bengel, Bengel’s New Testament Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-31935)
23. BDAG, s.v. “πείθω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19793)
24. Cf. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 520-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-29218)
25. Wallace, Greek Grammar, 521. [↑](#footnote-ref-18681)
26. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-18457)
27. Also see Graeser, Lynn and Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit, 34-40; Bullinger, “Word Studies on Holy Spirit,” Companion Bible, 146-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-20421)
28. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 499; Heinrich Meyer, Meyer’s Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-12382)
29. Robertson, Grammar, 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-27550)
30. Wuest, Word Studies: 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, and Jude, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-12036)
31. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski for the italics and sense, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 521; cf. also Henry Alford, The Greek Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-18836)
32. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 523-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-20299)
33. Meyer’s Commentary: James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, 593. [↑](#footnote-ref-28102)
34. Vincent’s Word Studies, 2:361. [↑](#footnote-ref-13352)
35. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-29501)
36. Cf.S. Smalley, 1,2, 3 John [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-32614)
37. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6:240-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-23699)
38. F. F. Bruce, The Gospels and the Epistles of John. [↑](#footnote-ref-26901)
39. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 539. [↑](#footnote-ref-20405)
40. Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, 4:503 (emphasis original). [↑](#footnote-ref-23002)
41. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 267, “polyptoton.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25459)
42. See, Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6:244. [↑](#footnote-ref-27225)
43. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 4th ed., 718. [↑](#footnote-ref-23359)
44. Bart Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-25298)
45. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 159, “tapeinosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12085)
46. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude, 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-24134)