

Getting Up to Speed: An Essential Introduction to 1 John

Barry Clyde Joslin

Barry Clyde Joslin is Assistant Professor of Christian Theology at Boyce College of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He received his Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Introduction and Purpose of Article

Over against our own evangelical culture, in which compromise, political correctness, spiritual lethargy, and cultural relativity are common, stands the short letter of 1 John. Few have poured over its pages without being personally confronted with the apostle's boldness and stark delineation between those who are "in the light" and those who still walk in the "darkness" of the world. None should miss the author's clear description of what it means to believe and confess the word of life as those who have been "born of God." A faithful study of 1 John yields a treasure trove of riches for the soul and mind as the reader is confronted by the apostle's message in its five short chapters. Does it matter what one believes? Does it matter what one believes about Jesus, specifically? Can one know God and it have no impact on one's life? John is bold and lucid on these and other matters and as such, his words are both timely and timeless. Indeed, such a message transcends the centuries and comes to us with abiding relevance.

The aim of this article is practical: to provide a framework for further study, preaching, and teaching of the Bible, specifically, 1 John. What follows is a tool that will hopefully prove useful to the pastor, Sunday School teacher, youth director, Bible study leader, and anyone else wanting an overview of John's first epistle. The article addresses the following five subjects: authorship and date; the origi-

nal recipients of the epistle; the epistle's overall purpose (i.e., why did John write?); various issues and theological emphases in 1 John; and the general outline/layout of the book. These five parts will then be followed by a brief conclusion.

Authorship and Date

These two issues can be treated together since they are so closely related. For most readers who study 1 John, the identification of "John" in the title is sufficient for ascertaining the author's identity.¹ In addition, this has been the traditional view of the church. Yet within New Testament studies there are many who refute Johannine authorship and make alternative arguments for the letter's writer.² In part the problem arises since nothing within 1 John unambiguously tells the reader exactly who the author is.³ The standard form for a New Testament letter consisted of five parts, the first being a salutation in which both the author and audience are identified. Yet 1 John does not include this opening salutation.⁴ Given this fact, it comes as no surprise that there are many conjectures concerning authorship.⁵

Authorship

Those who argue against the traditional view of John's authorship do so along several lines and make one (or a combination) of several arguments. First, since the authorship of the Gospel of John is disputed, and given the many similarities between John and 1 John in terms of

style, grammar, and theology, questions concerning the authorship of 1 John are inevitable for a number of scholars. Second, others have argued that another man by the name of John wrote the epistle. This man is likely “the elder” noted in 2 and 3 John. Yet nothing else is known of “John the elder,” and, as such, this view tells us nothing other than that an unknown fellow may have written the epistles.⁶ As Donald Guthrie notes, this is difficult to accept given the early church’s preference for apostolic authorship of those books they deemed authoritative.⁷ Third, some have suggested that the author of 1 John was actually a disciple of the apostle John, and thus the apostle “stands behind” the epistle in some fashion similar to the way that Simon Peter stands behind the Gospel of Mark. The difference is that Mark is never said to have been written by Peter. Fourth, still others have suggested that there are enough differences between the gospel of John and 1 John to warrant different authorship of the two. Yet such distinctions are not persuasive enough to support the claim of two different authors. Far more numerous and noteworthy are the *similarities* between 1 John and the Fourth Gospel.⁸ Finally, many have suggested that all Johannine writings are actually the product of a “Johannine Community” or “Johannine School,” and thus are not the writing of the apostle John. Such a “community” is said to have been taught and led by the beloved disciple, which eventually produced the Johannine writings. Thus, such writings are not the product of the apostle, but products of a group of John’s disciples written at a later time.⁹

Yet in spite of the above possibilities, a more compelling argument can be made in favor of the traditional view that John,

the son of Zebedee, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20) and author of the Fourth Gospel, wrote 1 John. This view is upheld by several strands of internal and external evidence.

Concerning external evidence, several late first century and second century church writings strongly echo the Johannine language found in 1 John.¹⁰ Clement of Rome described God’s people as those who are “perfected in love.” The *Didache* 10:5-6 (A.D. 90-120) bears a striking resemblance to 1 John 2:17. The *Epistle to Diognetus* contains such phrases as “God sent his only-begotten Son” and we “love him who first loved us,” both of which are quite Johannine. There are other possible allusions to 1 John in early church literature,¹¹ yet as Guthrie notes, each of these examples can perhaps be explained as part of the common milieu of first century Christian thought and, thus, are not *unambiguously* dependent on 1 John.¹² Nevertheless they are helpful and noteworthy in the overall discussion of authorship and authenticity of 1 John.

The first direct clear reference to a Johannine letter is that of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (near Laodicea), who is said to have quoted from “John’s former epistle.”¹³ The first direct dependence on 1 John comes from Polycarp, a disciple of John himself, who wrote a letter to the church at Philippi (A.D. 110-120) that is likely dependent on 1 John and/or 2 John.¹⁴ Irenaeus (A.D. 180) knows of the first two letters of John and attributes them to John the Lord’s disciple who wrote the Fourth Gospel.¹⁵ After the time of Irenaeus, the evidence is plentiful. In conclusion, the external evidence for the author being the apostle John is consistent, and the fact remains that in church history 1 John is never attributed to anyone other

than the apostle John.

Second is the internal evidence. Since a writer is nowhere named in 1 John, all matters of internal evidence hinge on its connection to the Fourth Gospel. The similarities between the two writings are notable.¹⁶ Both have a formal dualism that polarizes matters into stark antitheses such as darkness and light, love and hate, truth and lie, belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, life and death, children of God and children of the devil. On such dualisms, D. A. Carson notes that John absolutely forbids the “fuzzy thinking and relativism that are characteristic of our age.”¹⁷ These are fundamental issues that the writer of both the Fourth Gospel and 1 John is concerned with, and such common themes point to a common authorship.¹⁸ Both use the unique terms “Paraclete”¹⁹ and “one and only Son” (cf. “only-begotten Son” or “unique Son”).²⁰ Both are marked by the same simple syntax and a lack of conjunctions between sentences. In short, there is significant external and internal evidence that point to and support the traditional view of apostolic authorship of 1 John. The evidence therefore points to the author being John the apostle, son of Zebedee.

Date

If we accept that John the apostle, son of Zebedee, wrote 1 John, then it follows that it was written within his lifetime. Additionally, the date of the epistle is tied to the date of John’s Gospel, and the question arises as to which was first.²¹ The date is further narrowed when we consider the matter of John’s purpose to counter Docetism or proto-Gnosticism (see below). Early forms of Gnosticism arose towards the close of the first century A.D., and it seems warranted to date 1

John around A.D. 90. Smalley notes that this allows enough time “for a sharpening of the heterodox opinions on the part of some members of John’s community.”²² For those scholars who maintain Johannine authorship, the majority favor a date close to the last decade of the first century. Given the available evidence for authorship and dating, this is an appropriate and acceptable conclusion.

Place of Writing and Audience

Place of Writing

There is consistent evidence that the apostle John relocated to Ephesus during the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70, that he planted churches after moving to Ephesus, and that he was one of the foremost leaders in Asia Minor.²³ Further, historical accounts inform us that other church leaders would make the trek to Ephesus in order to hear John recount stories about Jesus and to listen to the teaching of the apostle. Ancient traditions originating in Ephesus also inform us that John’s tomb is in Ephesus. Therefore, it is not reaching to assume that the apostle John was an evangelist, church planter, and pastor in the Mediterranean world whose first-hand knowledge of Jesus’ life, teachings and ministry is woven into this epistle.

Audience

We are limited in what we know about the recipients of 1 John given that no specific group or individual is mentioned. Yet by means of inductive study we can gain some insight into John’s community.²⁴ The epistle presupposes a particular pastoral situation written to an actual church of believers united around a common confession of faith in Christ. For John, this confession establishes the community. For this reason, it is essential to confess

something concrete and distinct about Jesus Christ (that he is the Son of God who has come in the flesh), apart from which a person is not part of the Christian community.²⁵

The letter was not written in a vacuum, but rather to a specific group of second or third generation Asiatic churches faced with doctrinal and moral conflicts.²⁶ What is clear is that the writer speaks tenderly to the recipients, addressing them as “dear friends” and “little children.” He also uses the first-person pronouns “we” and “I,” thereby demonstrating a personal and pastoral accent that has few rivals in the whole of the New Testament. Brooke notes the centrality of the pastoral role when he writes that the biblical author “is a pastor first, an orthodox theologian only afterwards.”²⁷

Yet this pastor also writes with absolute apostolic authority and without fear.²⁸ On the one hand, he commands the audience, and on the other he calls the opponents “liars” (2:4, 22; 4:20), unequivocally asserting that they are sons of the devil (3:10), antichrists (2:18, 22; 4:3), and false prophets (4:1). Though John is focused on rebutting the heresy of these opponents, John Stott is correct in his assertion that the apostle’s foremost concern is to protect his beloved “little children.”²⁹ On the one hand one senses John’s deep affection for Christ’s sheep,³⁰ and on the other his intolerance for those who would pervert the “word of life” that he proclaims. This is the voice of a pastor and theologian.

Gary Burge states that John’s community consisted of a mix of Jews and Greeks with a common bond and firm allegiance to Christ.³¹ Given that there are few allusions to the Old Testament in the epistle (though John’s theology is clearly shaped by his Jewish understanding³²) and no

direct quotations from the Old Testament, Simon Kistemaker suggests that the impression is left that John’s readers were in fact *mostly* Gentile, though he would not rule out a Jewish contingent.³³ Second, they appear not to be recent converts to Christianity, but have heard the message of Christ “from the beginning” (2:24; 3:11). Third, the consistent evidence for John’s ministry in Ephesus would mean that he succeeded Paul and Timothy as pastor.³⁴ Therefore the author presumably lived among those to whom he wrote.³⁵

Therefore it may be concluded that John the apostle wrote 1 John from the Ephesus region to the circle of Asiatic churches,³⁶ of which Ephesus was the center, which were Gentile-Jewish in their makeup. This area would also include the territory of the seven churches mentioned in Rev 2-3.

Purpose of Epistle

There was much syncretism of religious thought in Asia Minor given the level of intellectual activity of the cities there, especially Ephesus. Bruce asserts, “[T]here is ample contemporary evidence of syncretism in life and thought, of the fusion of their ancestral beliefs and practices with features from the older ethnic religions of Asia Minor and from more recent mystery cults and philosophical trends.”³⁷ Against this backdrop one can better grasp the words of Paul when he warns the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30 concerning “savage wolves” that will arise and false teachers that will come from within the Ephesian church who will “speak perverse things” and “draw away the disciples after them.” Paul’s grief over the churches in Asia is especially pronounced in 2 Tim 1 when he writes that all in Asia turned away from him (v. 15).³⁸ If we are correct in our dating

and provenance of 1 John, then it is not too surprising to find that some three decades after the events recorded in Acts 20 we find that matters have escalated in Ephesus. Indeed Paul's words have come true; the Ephesian believers are facing significant trouble from within their own ranks, according to 1 John.

A crisis arose in John's community as a result of individuals who advocated a different understanding of Christ and the nature of Christianity.³⁹ False teachers were causing trouble and misleading John's "little children." It is within this context that the apostle writes with such a polemical tone.⁴⁰ It is his affection for the beloved (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11) and the truth concerning Christ that fuels the epistle's polemical and pastoral tone. True Christian fellowship (*koinōnia*) is tied to a proper Christian confession, and where there is false teaching about Christ, there is no true fellowship with God or with those who abide in him. Such is the beauty of 1 John—John's refusal to compromise with false doctrine concerning the person and work of Christ. On this subject Carson is worth quoting at length. He writes,

Christianity . . . embraces truth, the denial of which merely proves one is not a Christian; it defines conduct, the systematic flouting of which demonstrates one is outside the camp. Precisely because our age thinks that ambiguity and relativism are signs of intellectual and even moral maturity, John's immovable tests are the more necessary as we seek to construct inductively-shaped biblical theology.⁴¹

Within this community there were those who had already seceded, whom John refers to as "antichrists." The use of this term is telling. John acknowledges that one day *the* Antichrist will come (2:18), yet now there are already many

antichrists. In the Johannine epistles, the "antichrists" essentially taught false doctrines about Christ. Specifically, they denied that Jesus was the Christ who had come in the flesh. They also did not take sin to be a serious matter.⁴² A number of them had already seceded from the confessing community (2:18-19). In addition to referring to them as "antichrists," John also labels them "false prophets" (4:1). Further, though they had seceded from the community, they were still attempting to influence the community to accept their aberrant teaching (2:26). As such, John's community of believers needed a word of encouragement and more importantly, *assurance* from their pastor and spiritual father (5:13).⁴³ Brooke remarks that it is essential "to remember that his primary objects are to exhort and to edify."⁴⁴

Heretical Teaching

What did the heretics in John's community teach?⁴⁵ We have none of their writings (if there were any to begin with), and the information about them that we do have is from reading John's rebuttal of their teachings, the specifics of which are the subject of some debate. Yet by utilizing John's affirmations and denials, we see that the opponents denied that Jesus was the Christ (2:22), the Son of God who came in the flesh as God's Son (2:23; 4:2, 15) by means of water and blood (5:6). They also apparently downplayed the magnitude of sin, did not keep the commandments themselves, and argued that they were not subject to sin (1:6-10). Their own conduct lacked love and was schismatic, and was therefore a denial of the gospel they claimed to believe. Further, they alone claimed to have the right teaching, which led some in John's community to doubt whether or not they themselves had the

Spirit (2:26-27).

Identity of the Opponents

Just who were the “secessionists”? We must be careful when trying to identify John’s opponents precisely. After considering the essence of their teaching, we can compare this to what is known about the various heretical movements that arose in the late first century. Then we may ask if John’s adversaries can be tied to any such movement. The question concerning the identification of John’s opponents has warranted three main answers:⁴⁶ (1) Docetism, (2) the teachings of Cerinthus, or (3) some early form of Gnosticism (proto-Gnosticism). Given what is known at this point, these are the most likely of the available options. Of these, the third is the most promising explanation of the current data.

Docetism

First, Docetism (from the Greek word *dokeō*, “to seem”) was an early church heresy that argued that the humanity and sufferings of the earthly Christ only *seemed* real, yet were not real. Jesus seemed like a human, but actually was not. What we know about this heresy comes mainly from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35-107), who was led to Rome and martyred for his Christian beliefs. Given its emphasis on a higher knowledge and reasons for rejecting the incarnation of Christ (such as material-immaterial dualism), Docetism is a branch of the larger “theosophical *potpourri*” known as Gnosticism (see below).⁴⁷ Docetism held that spirit is good and matter is evil and that there could be no direct mingling of the “Supreme God,” who is spirit, and the material universe (including man), since matter is essentially evil. Therefore, how

could the Christ (a spirit-being) become flesh, which by definition is evil? The realm of the material is the locus of sin and evil, and the divine Christ could, thus, never actually become a man. Therefore, Jesus only *seemed* to be a man, and only *seemed* to suffer and die.

Some 1 John scholars have found the Docetist argument quite plausible, and there is merit in it.⁴⁸ However, there are critical differences between the seceders and Docetism, such as the fact that the Docetists had strong Jewish tendencies, yet there is nothing to counter this in 1 John. Therefore, what is known about them does not fit the group of seceders of 1 John.⁴⁹

Cerinthianism

Second, some have suggested that the teachings of Cerinthus are in view, and such a suggestion is plausible. What we know about him chiefly comes through the writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius.⁵⁰ Cerinthus was an early Christian heretic (ca. A.D. 100) who taught that the world was not created by the God of the Bible, but by a Demiurge or the angels who shaped it from formless matter. Jesus was a mere man, but at Jesus’ baptism, the divine “Christ” (an eternal and divine power) came upon him. The “Christ” left Jesus the man at some point prior to the crucifixion since the divine Christ, being spirit and thus good, cannot suffer.⁵¹ Thus Cerinthus divided the earthly Jesus (who is man/flesh) from the heavenly Christ (who is spirit).

Yet, like Docetism, there are problems with associating the seceders in 1 John with Cerinthus and his followers. Colin Kruse notes that there is no evidence to suggest that Cerinthus was ever part of the Johannine community, and there is

much known error attributed to Cerinthus that finds no mention in 1 John.⁵² In addition, if John were in fact writing against a specific individual such as Cerinthus, why is he not named? If the account from Polycarp about John and Cerinthus is accurate concerning the bathhouse scene in Ephesus, then the apostle knew Cerinthus. Therefore, why not mention Cerinthus by name if it is his specific teachings that are in view? If we accept the apostle John to be the author of 3 John, then we find that he does in fact name his opponent in that epistle, Diotrephes. Diotrephes does not accept John (3 John 9-11), and his life is evil and not worthy of imitation. He is opposed by John for what was likely a combination of ecclesiastical and doctrinal disagreement,⁵³ and John opposes Diotrephes by *naming* him. Thus, if John were writing against a specific individual (or a particular known teacher such as Cerinthus) in 1 John, it seems strange that he did not name him, since he does name his opponent in 3 John. Thus, taken with the other evidence, it seems less likely that the Cerinthus option is preferable.

Proto-Gnosticism

Rather than the suggestions above, the preferable view is that some early form of Gnosticism (“proto-Gnosticism”) is maintained by John’s opponents. “Gnosticism” (from the word *gnōsis*, meaning “knowledge”) itself is quite difficult to pin down since it was an amalgamation of Jewish, Christian, and pagan teachings.⁵⁴ Gnosticism as a whole is quite broad, and, to add to the confusion, both Docetism and the teachings of Cerinthus were fundamentally gnostic. Yet there are a few main points from which the various sub-groups develop their core aberrant teachings.

First (like Docetism), Gnosticism was anchored in dualism that dichotomizes matter (which is evil), and spirit (which is good). It was thought that the Supreme God could not have created the world since it is matter and thus evil. Since matter is evil, there can be no biblical doctrine of creation, incarnation, or bodily resurrection, and thus the Divine Logos could never be united with human flesh. Second, knowledge was essential and its acquisition was of chief importance. Those who were enlightened had been granted special knowledge by revelation from God, and it was via this knowledge that one’s spirit could be saved, salvation being defined as freedom from the shackles of the body.⁵⁵ Therefore there can be no bodily resurrection at all, since salvation is by definition freedom from the body. Knowledge is only possessed by the spiritually elite “elect,” within whom is the capacity for liberation from the matter of this world. Third, in Gnosticism there is a Supreme God, the Ultimate Father (separate from the Demiurge who is the evil Old Testament creator god), from whom proceeds a number of lesser beings known as aeons. The Old Testament God is inferior to the Supreme God, the father of Christ. This theology/philosophy did not fully mature until some 50 to 200 years after 1 John was written, and was represented by a wide variety of gnostic groups.

Most scholars today agree that John is not countering full-orbed Gnosticism.⁵⁶ Yet most agree that John is not countering the other common suggestions either. What most affirm is that there are elements of each of these three suggestions found in the teachings of John’s adversaries. As such, “proto-Gnosticism” has been put forward in recent decades

as a more careful and acceptable view in light of more recent research (such as the Nag Hammadi texts). Proto-Gnosticism is Gnosticism in its early forms, and was gestating at the time of the composition of 1 John. Thus, in light of the available evidence, Carson concludes,

It still seems best to conclude that John is combating proto-Gnosticism, an embryonic Docetism or Cerinthianism that has already divided Christians. Over against the emphases of his opponents . . . John stresses the truth that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh and that genuine belief in this Jesus works itself out in obedience to the commands of God and in love for God's people.⁵⁷

In conclusion, it is preferable to view John as having written this epistle in order to counter an early form of Gnosticism that had become influential in his community of believers. False teachers propounding this philosophy had been a part of the community and had left, leaving behind a community that needed assurance from its apostolic pastor. As their pastor, spiritual father, and the Lord's apostle, John saw the importance of combating the false teaching and of drawing proverbial "lines in the sand" that determined what was Christian and what was not; his opposition is rooted in his pastoral leadership and oversight of the sheep. Such tending and shepherding involves teaching, assuring, discerning, and rebuking, *but not inventing*. John had no new message. Both then and now the pastor's role is not to invent or to be innovative so much as to be faithful to pass on and preserve the apostolic gospel message. The reader senses John's deep love for his message as well as his people; this is evident as he encourages and assures them of their true confession. John loves God's people and sound doctrine; there is no choosing

between the two. As one commissioned by Christ Himself (John 20:21-23), John carries out this commission by loving, teaching, exhorting, and assuring his flock as well as censuring false doctrine and its adherents in no uncertain terms. This is the purpose of the epistle.

Issues and Emphases

John's Three Tests

Given the above section concerning John's purpose and the opponents, it comes as no surprise that the main theological emphasis in the letter is Christology. For John, what one believes about Jesus (orthodoxy/doctrine) has a direct connection to how one lives (orthopraxy/ethics). Stated simply, right belief will be evident in how one lives, since "the one who says 'I know him' yet does not keep his commandments is a liar" (2:3). Thus, these two themes dominate the epistle: belief and obedience. To have the former necessitates the latter, and the latter demonstrates the validity of the former. These two themes are broken into three familiar tests to which John continually returns: the test of doctrine, the test of obedience, and the test of love.⁵⁸ They are "tests" in the manner of a "litmus test." A litmus test is used in the field of chemistry to test for chemical acidity or basicity using litmus paper. The test tells whether the chemical is an acid or a base. Similarly, John's three "tests" assure one that he or she is in fact a genuine Christian or not, since genuine Christians are marked by right belief, obedience to God, and love for one another in the same manner that an acid or base is marked by a certain pH level ranging from 0 to 14. And in John's theology, there is no reading of "7" (or neutral). One is either a 0 or a 14!

These are given not as a way to exclude

some from the community of faith. Indeed, the seceders had *already* left (2:19). Rather, they are presented as a way to assure believers that their confession is genuine, and that their lives demonstrate their valid confession of Jesus as the Christ. Here there is an intricate connection between *believing*, *keeping* the commands, and *loving* fellow Christians (3:23-24; 5:1-3).

The Doctrinal Test

First is the test of right doctrine and belief concerning Christ. Given the tolerant and syncretistic nature of Greco-Roman religion, adding another deity to the mix was not significant. However, claiming that this deity became a man to suffer the punishment of death in order to give eternal life to all who believe in him was significant. Early in the church's life the temptation to conform Christ to the surrounding culture was a real allure-ment to which some had capitulated. This is paralleled in today's religious climate. Many core doctrines have been called into question and debate (such as God's exhaustive foreknowledge and the authority and sufficiency of Scripture) by fellow evangelicals. John's standing firm and drawing an uncompromising line in the sand concerning the matter of core doctrines serves as an example for today's church leaders to contend for the faith in the midst of a religious climate seemingly bent on eroding the Church's doctrinal foundation. Other issues such as the acceptance of homosexuality by mainline denominations further accent the move to soften the very nature of the gospel until it is palatable to all, therefore saving none.

In contrast, John takes pains to teach the centrality of the person and work

of Christ in no uncertain terms, and to insure that those who know Christ cannot simply add teachings about him in order to form a more palatable Christianity. For John, a believer must adhere to specific things about Christ in order to be legitimate. One must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20), who has come in the flesh (1:1-4; 4:2; cf. John 1:14) by water and blood (5:6), who is the Christ (2:22; 5:1; cf. 1:3; 2:1; 2:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20), who suffered and died for sin (1:7; 2:1-2, 12; 4:10). Right belief must be distinguished from error. Consequently, John tells them not to believe every spirit, but to test every spirit (4:1) to see if it is truth or error (4:6). John Stott notes, "So behind every prophet is a spirit, and behind each spirit either God or the devil It is their origin that matters."⁵⁹ Christian faith is thus not without discrimination and discernment since "true faith examines its object before reposing confidence in it."⁶⁰ And what is the test? It is a doctrinal test about the person of Christ (4:2). Those who fail this test are false prophets from the world and not from God (4:1, 3-6). John leaves no room for error or compromise in such matters. In fact, the centrality of right belief about Christ is of such importance that John says where this is denied the person is a liar, does not have the Father, and is an antichrist (2:22-23). God has commanded "that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (3:23), and therefore *saving faith has specific content*. Faith will not save; faith *in Christ* saves. Their assurance is tied to their believing *correctly* about Christ. This comes from their believing right things about Jesus (5:12-13), knowing that right belief means that they have been "born of God" (5:1) and are thus "kept by God" (5:18). Right belief necessarily leads

to obedience and love, the subjects of tests two and three.

However, a word of caution is necessary lest we make Christian assurance have its basis in one's actions.⁶¹ John does *not* mean that one becomes entitled to assurance and confidence before God as long as he or she lives righteously. Rather, the *basis* for one's assurance is *Christ*, the righteous one, who is our advocate before God (2:1). He has effectively removed the wrath of God and cleansed all who believe in his name (2:2, 12; 3:5; 4:10). It is essential not to mistake the place of "doing righteousness" (3:7) in John's theology. Assurance rests in the work of Christ who *is* (present tense) our advocate before God. Yet John is also quite clear that the one who has been "born of God" (i.e., spiritual rebirth) will be transformed. In short, "it is unthinkable that a life that has truly known the power of the gospel should not have been changed by it."⁶²

For instance, consider 2:29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know also that every one who practices [lit. "does"] righteousness *has been born* of Him." God's act of the rebirth *precedes* the doing of righteousness. The present actions of loving God and the present fact of knowing God are rooted in a past event, namely, being born of God (4:7). Further, all who love the Father also will love their brothers and sisters in Christ—all others who have been "born of Him" (5:1). The one who has been born of God overcomes the world, and this victory is tied to *faith* (5:4). The content of faith is explicit—faith in Jesus as the Son of God (5:5).⁶³ For John, obedience and love in the present are the logical fruit of the rebirth in the past. One's life reflects the transformation of saving faith, and our assurance is ultimately grounded in the person and work of Christ our Advocate.

The Test of Obedience

Yet the test of doctrine cannot stand on its own, and genuine believers will also pass the test of obedience. Authentic Christianity believes certain things and is both visibly and tangibly practiced.⁶⁴ John uses the term "commandment(s)" (*entolē*) fourteen times with the assumption that believers will obey the commandment(s). In 2:3-6, John's readers can be assured that they have come to know God by keeping his commandments, and prayers are answered for those who obey the commandments (3:22-23).⁶⁵ In contrast, the one who claims to know God, and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar. The "liars" in 1 John are John's opponents, but by implication the same could be said of anyone who claims to believe in Christ, yet does not live a life marked by obedience to Him.

John is especially clear on this point in 3:6-10. After stating that sin is lawlessness, that all who practice sin commit lawlessness, and that Christ was revealed in order to remove sins (3:4-5), the apostle writes, "Each one who abides in him does not sin; each one who sins has neither seen him nor has known him" (3:6). In contrast, the one who does/practices righteousness is righteous just as Christ is righteous (3:7). The absolute statements found in 3:6 and 3:9 look like John is saying that believers never and cannot sin. These verses have stirred no little debate. This is particularly true when compared to 2:1 and 1:8-10 in which John acknowledges that believers do in fact sometimes sin. Though a difficult exegetical issue, it is not to be thought that John contradicts himself. Rather, the confusion over the absolute statements of 3:6 and 3:9 can be significantly quelled by considering both the grammar and the surrounding context.

Consider the following. The verb forms of “sin” in 3:6 and 3:9 as well as “do/commit sin” in 3:8 (cf. 5:18) are all present tense forms and can be translated in the sense of “continually sins,” in a habitual sense, since the present tense often has this meaning.⁶⁶ The meaning is not that a believer can never sin, having somehow lost the ability to sin once converted.⁶⁷ Rather, John draws out the differences between those who are God’s and those who are not in a most direct and unambiguous way: one’s life is marked by sin and the other’s is not.⁶⁸ In the second half of 3:6 (“everyone who sins has not seen him”) the present tense participle should be understood to mean the one who “continually sins.” Abiding in God means that sin is unthinkable (cp. Gal 5:16). In 3:9 the Greek literally reads, “Everyone who is born of God does not do sin . . . and he is not able to sin.” The present tense is used here as well, and more than likely it should be interpreted in the same customary/habitual sense.⁶⁹ This is further reinforced by the statement in 3:8b that the “devil sins from the beginning” (not “sinned”). The devil, and all those who are his (lit., “the one who practices/does sin” in 3:8a), continually/habitually sin and can do none else. In contrast, and this is John’s point, those who are from God do not continually/habitually sin. John speaks elsewhere of one “doing” the will of God (2:17), and of the one “doing” righteousness (2:29). In each occurrence what is in view is the idea of the one who “practices” these things, that is, one’s life is characterized by “doing God’s will” and “doing righteousness,” both of which are ways of saying that the genuine believer’s life is characterized by obedience to God. Therefore, the likely interpretation of John’s absolute statements concerning

the believer and sin is that the believer no longer habitually sins and continues in sin.⁷⁰ Baugh concludes that if John *had* wished to express perfectionism, there was a way to do so using normal grammatical conventions of the day, such as utilizing a different tense.⁷¹

Some have disagreed with this interpretation,⁷² suggesting that John’s grammatical usage is not a strong enough argument. Some maintain that the preceding argument based on the present tense actually serves to weaken John’s point in this passage, since what John says is meant to be understood in the most black and white terms. John makes strong rhetorical statements articulated in the strongest of idealistic terms. The absolute statements should not be softened by appeals to the grammar, even if contradictions seem to exist on the surface. Instead, John is arguing for a perfectionistic ideal,⁷³ i.e., for Christians to *become* what they *are*.⁷⁴ Believers, who have the seed of God in them (the Holy Spirit, 3:9), never have an excuse to sin. Rather, they have power to overcome every sin and obey the commands of God. This is in contrast to John’s opponents who seem to be arguing that Christians are free to sin.⁷⁵ Even if this is John’s meaning, it does not suggest that Christians are automatically sinless. Rather, such black and white expressions as those found in 3:6 and 3:9 (cf. 5:18) serve to challenge the believer to perfect obedience. Sinlessness is the proper implication of the new birth and is therefore the Christian’s obligation. This is in contrast to the seceders, who seemed to argue that sinlessness has been realized in their own lives.⁷⁶ Thus, a Christian cannot consistently sin, though on occasion may in fact so do (2:1).

The perceptive reader will notice that

the above interpretive options arrive at essentially the same point by taking different routes, though the former view is preferable. Both of these plausible options affirm that what is in view is that John is making the strongest appeal for holiness and obedience in the believer who has the power to overcome every sin and obey by means of God who indwells him (4:16) and Christ who guards him (5:18). Both perspectives maintain that John does not contradict himself in 1:8-2:1. It logically follows that those who have been born of God are fundamentally distinct from those that are not (i.e., the seceders against whom John is writing), and the difference is a life of abiding in God and obedience to him in contrast to those who practice sin and are thus of the devil (3:8, 10).⁷⁷ A transformed life characterized by obedience is in view. Sin marks the children of the devil; obedience marks the children of God.

In conclusion, John further distinguishes Christians and non-Christians by the test of obedience. Do we obey the commands of God and live righteously, or not? Those who have the seed of God abiding in them do not practice sin. This is the second of 1 John's tests, the test of obedience.

The Test of Love

The third and final test is the test of love. The reader should note that the tests of obedience and love are woven together frequently, and Carson is quick to note that they are tightly bound.⁷⁸ Consider 5:2, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe his commandments" (NASU). Obedience and love are linked, since to obey his commandments means that we love one another and vice versa. The

life of the genuine believer is marked by love for fellow believers that is not to be equated to mere sentimentalism (3:11-18). Schlatter asserts that instead of love being seen as a heightened emotion, for John it is "the will to the generous deed."⁷⁹ Love for the brethren is an indicator (test) that a person has "passed out of death into life" (3:14). Further, that love is an emphasis in 1 John is born out by the raw statistics: the verb form is used twenty-eight times in seventeen different verses, while the noun form is used eighteen times in fourteen different verses.⁸⁰

Moreover, the injunction to love one another (4:7) is based in God the Father who *is* love (4:8).⁸¹ Love is rooted in action and this is seen in God's sending of his Son to give life to those who believe (4:9). His love is made evident in his concrete action of sending Christ to bear the wrath of God and to cleanse believers from guilt and sin (4:10).⁸² Love, therefore, is "manifested" or "made known" in a tangible way. God is the one who loved first, and believers are only able to love because God has done so already (4:10, 19). He is love's origin and source; love originates with God, and thus all who are born of God love. God is invisible, yet is visibly displayed in the believing community when the members display love for one another. This is the meaning of "God abides in us and his love [for us]⁸³ is perfected⁸⁴ in us" (4:12). To be born of God necessitates that the same trait of "the begetter" is found in those whom he has begotten. Thus, the children of God are evident by loving one another in tangible ways (4:11-12). Note the test in 4:12: "if we love one another, [then] God abides in us." This is echoed in 4:16 and recalls 4:7. God has demonstrated his love, and those who are part of the believing community have

responded positively to it by belief in the Son.⁸⁵ Finally, the one who loves will have no fear in the coming day of judgment, but rather will be confident in that day (4:17-18). Conversely, the one who lacks love (for John, the secessionists are primarily in view) will have fear in the day of judgment, because that one demonstrably does not know God and will thus face punishment. This is the third test—does one love the family of God?

These, then, are John's three tests for all who make a claim to know God: the tests of doctrine, obedience, and love. Carson rightly contends, "One cannot pass one or two out of three of these tests; in John's view, they stand or fall together."⁸⁶ In contrast, the seceders from the community failed all three.

The Holy Spirit

An additional theological emphasis in 1 John is the Spirit.⁸⁷ The Holy Spirit is the "anointing" (*chrisma*) that all believers receive from Christ (2:20, 27).⁸⁸ It is important to note that this anointing is not from the Holy Spirit, but is from Christ and is the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹ The term used in 2:20 and 2:27 (*chrisma*) only appears here in the entire New Testament. Outside the New Testament it refers to anointing people with oil, such as those undergoing baptism.⁹⁰ The Spirit has a specific teaching role which recalls Jesus' words to his disciples in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:12-15. As such, the readers of 1 John can be comforted knowing that they are not lacking in the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, are not lacking in knowledge of spiritual matters (2:26-27). This is in contrast to the seceders who likely were arguing their "varsity" status over against the others' "junior-varsity" status. Yet John here says that the seceders are antichrists and false prophets

(2:18; 4:1), because their new "spiritual" knowledge is a lie that leads them to deny the person and work of Christ (2:22-23). The seceders have not received the Spirit. For John, the Spirit testifies to the truth; therefore, the believing community must stand firm and hold to that which they received from the beginning (2:24).

Since they have the Spirit, they know about "all things" (2:27). This must be understood in context. If John were saying that they know all things about everything and that there was no need for teaching of any kind whatsoever, then John's very writing of the epistle would violate such a statement. Yet the context illumines what John really means. John writes of the truth that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the truth that they have heard from the beginning. The Spirit testifies to them about this truth and causes the believer to be able to detect the doctrinal error being espoused by the seceders.⁹¹ They are in no need of the seceders' teaching about this matter and they lack nothing. Even John states that he has not written to tell them the truth since they already know it (2:21)! There is likely an allusion here to the New Covenant passage found in Jer 31:31-34, where it was promised, "'They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the Lord."⁹²

Finally, concerning the Holy Spirit that abides in them (2:27), there is a parallel idea in 3:24 (cf. 4:4) where John tells them that God abides in them, and also in 3:9 where "God's seed" refers to the Holy Spirit. As such they are defended against the deceptive teachings of the antichrists and by which they become incapable of apostasy.⁹³ "Seed of God"

(*sperma autou*) in 3:9 is a “bold metaphor which, when unpacked, refers to the Holy Spirit who effects spiritual birth in those who believe.”⁹⁴ It is the Holy Spirit who is God’s means for accomplishing the new and spiritual birth, thereby making one God’s child. Such (re)birthing language likely lies behind 1 John’s consistent familial terminology in the epistle. The apostle sees the believing community to be the children of God the Father, who sent his one and only Son in the flesh as an atoning sacrifice and cleansing for sin, who accomplishes the act of the rebirth by means of his seed, the Holy Spirit, on behalf of all who believe in the name of his Son. For John, the community of believers is the family of God, born of God, by means of the Spirit who affirms the truth.

In conclusion, 1 John is a letter densely packed with matters of doctrine and practice. Most of the epistle’s major themes were introduced above, yet there are a number of other matters that could be mentioned for further study. These include: John’s theme of “abiding,” the textual question in 5:7, the eschatological references (2:18, 28; 4:17, etc.), his emphasis on sin, and his emphasis on eternal life, to name a few. If the reader is interested in these matters, he or she should consult the bibliographic references in the endnotes for a number of helpful and accessible resources such as the better commentaries and dictionaries.

Layout of 1 John

First John resists easy outlining⁹⁵ and, many of the best commentaries are split over the layout of the book. The letter is normally divided into either two or three main sections, yet more than one has concluded that 1 John cannot and should not be divided into such major sections.⁹⁶

Another acknowledges that fewer things are more difficult in Johannine studies that outlining 1 John.⁹⁷ However, Carson and Moo contend that a larger structure can be ascertained, and the idea that it cannot is rather haphazard and unnecessary.⁹⁸ Most divide the book into either two or three main sections, with an introduction before (1:1-4), and a conclusion/epilogue after (5:13– 21).⁹⁹ Thus the question is how to divide 1:5-5:12?

Traditionally, a two-part configuration divides the text at 2:29, yielding a 1:5-2:29 unit and a 3:1-5:12 unit.¹⁰⁰ In recent years greater attention has been given to this configuration, with slight variations. First, the Gospel of John has two main sections with a prologue before and epilogue after,¹⁰¹ and it very well could be that John models the structure of 1 John after that of his Gospel. Second, Brown asserts that John makes two chief assertions about God in his Gospel, namely, that “God is Light” and “God is Love” (John 1:5; 4:6) and as such 1 John mimics this thematic form thusly:

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. Part 1: God is Light (1:5-3:10)
- III. Part 2: God is Love (3:11-5:12)
- IV. Conclusion (5:13-21)¹⁰²

Each main division begins with a similar statement, “This is the message . . . God is Light” (1:5), and “This is the message . . . God is Love” (3:11). Such an organization has found support by recent Johannine scholars such as Brown, Burge, and Akin and has many strengths, one of which is its simplicity.¹⁰³

A three-part division also finds significant support among scholars today and according to Brown’s analysis is more frequently accepted than other proposals.¹⁰⁴ Of those who maintain a three-fold division, Schnackenburg has received

much attention and acceptance, and his outline is as follows:

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. Part 1: Fellowship with God Means Walking in the Light (1:5-2:17)
- III. Part 2: The Present Situation of John's Readers (2:18-3:24)
- IV. Part 3: The Separation of Those Who Belong to God from the World (4:1-5:12)
- V. Conclusion (5:13-21)¹⁰⁵

Schnackenburg asserts that there are distinct breaks at 2:18 and 4:1 that must be taken as markers of the epistle's divisions. In this outline, one of John's ideas leads to another, and the beginnings and endings of each section form recognizable units of thought.¹⁰⁶ In each case, there is a focus on John's opponents, be they called "anti-christs" (2:18) or "false prophets" (4:1). In this outline, there is a distinct focus on the purpose of John's writing against specific opponents. This appears to be preferred by Carson and Moo, and is adopted by Kistemaker among others.¹⁰⁷

To be sure, it is difficult to be dogmatic concerning which of the above outlines is correct, since both have strengths and weaknesses. Both two-part and three-part outlines (and their variations) have been used by scholars, pastors, and church leaders with success. Westcott's assertion is as true today as it was when he wrote in 1883, "No single arrangement is able to take account of the complex development of thought which it offers, and of the many connexions which exists between its different parts."¹⁰⁸ Yet regardless of how one divides the book, there is near universal agreement that John circles around a few basic ideas (particularly the three tests discussed above) to which he continually returns.

Conclusion

We cannot measure the importance of Bible study for the Christian. Children of God are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and there is nothing that feeds the believer like the worship of God's people gathered around his Word. Theology leads to doxology, and thus the study of what God has revealed in 1 John ought to lead his people to worship the one of whom this revelation speaks. For John, this God is the God of truth who has sent his only Son to atone for the sins of all who would believe in him. The common confession that Jesus is the Christ is brought about by the rebirth and produces love and obedience in the lives of the children of God. In calling out error and assuring his fellow believers, John serves as an example of pastoral leadership, Christian love, and uncompromising commitment both to the Lord and his people.

ENDNOTES

¹The superscription ("1 John") was more than likely added at a later date when the epistles were grouped together, and thus is not part of the original document.

²Donald Guthrie acknowledges that most of today's New Testament scholarship rejects John's authorship, though he and many other conservative scholars are persuaded that John was in fact responsible for writing the epistle, and thus not persuaded by the historical criticism of modern New Testament scholarship. See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (4th rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 858-64.

³Among others, Carson and Moo logically argue that the question of authorship ultimately hinges on the authorship of the Gospel of John and the relation

between it and the Johannine epistles (D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 671-72). See also A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), i-xix, 235-42.

⁴The five parts are: salutation, thanksgiving/prayer, body, exhortation/instruction, and conclusion. This basic format is not present in the epistle to the Hebrews either, and therefore its author and audience are much debated as well. These two epistles are the only examples in the New Testament in which neither the author nor the audience are named. Even 2 and 3 John include salutations, enigmatic though they be (“The elder to the elect lady and her children” [2 John]; “The elder to Gaius” [3 John]).

⁵For the interested reader, ample discussion of authorship of the Gospel of John and the epistles of John (and other important introductory matters) can be found in such New Testament works as those by Guthrie (*New Testament Introduction*), Carson and Moo (*An Introduction to the New Testament*), as well as the many relevant articles in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [NDBT] (ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* [DJG] (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. H. Marshall; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), and *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*

[DLNT] (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997)].

See also commentaries on John’s Gospel such as George Beasley-Murray, *John* (2nd ed.; Word Biblical Commentary; vol. 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999); F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* (New American Commentary; vol. 25a; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996); D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*; (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Andreas Köstenberger, *John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); and R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

See also commentaries on 1 John such as F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John* (New American Commentary; vol. 38; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001); John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960); I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Anchor Bible; vol. 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (Word Bibli-

cal Commentary; vol. 51; Waco, TX: Word, 1984); Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

⁶For a nuanced discussion of this possibility, see Marshall, *Epistles*, 42-46. Marshall personally prefers to see the apostle John as having written the Gospel and the epistles or being responsible for their contents, yet he maintains that other suggestions for authorship cannot be ruled out (such as the epistles having been written by a disciple of John and not the apostle himself).

⁷Guthrie, *New Testament*, 863. Guthrie goes on to note that 1 John was accepted on the basis of its being written by an apostle. Therefore, were the early church fathers likely to be confused over two “Johns”? This is doubtful.

⁸See Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 672-75. Also note the comments by Stott, “Even a superficial reading of the Gospel and the First Epistle reveals a striking similarity between the two in both subject-matter and syntax. The general subjects treated are much the same” (Stott, *Epistles of John*, 17). See also Marshall, *Epistles*, 33; Guthrie, *New Testament*, 871-79; and Westcott, *Epistles*, xxx. For a comparison of the Gospel of John and 1 John, see

Brooke, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, i-xix, 235-42.

⁹For a brief discussion on the “Johannine Community” hypothesis, see the recent commentary on John’s Gospel by Köstenberger (*John*, 1-8). For more, see Brown, *Epistles*, 14-35; idem, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

¹⁰See Stott, *Epistles*, 14-15; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 670-71; Guthrie, *New Testament*, 858-59.

¹¹See for example the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, the writings of Justin Martyr, the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and Dionysius, and the Muratorian Canon, all of which are from the mid to late second and third centuries.

¹²Guthrie, *New Testament*, 858-59.

¹³This information comes from the early church historian Eusebius, who added the word “former” in his recording of the Papias account. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.29.17. Eusebius notes that Papias was a “hearer of John” and companion of Polycarp (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.1). If Papias and Polycarp knew John and knew of the letter known to us as 1 John, then such an eyewitness account would be most weighty.

¹⁴Compare Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians 7:1 to 1 John 4:2-3. If there is dependence in these two passages, it becomes quite tenable that Polycarp was drawing from the letter known as 1 John, or from teachings received directly from John. Stott is certain that this is the first direct reference to a Johannine

epistle (*Epistles*, 14), and Carson and Moo state that the above reference in Polycarp is “surely dependent on 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2-3; cf. 1 John 2:22” (*Introduction*, 670-71).

¹⁵Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16.18.

¹⁶Brooke has compiled an extensive list. See Brooke, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, i-xix, 235-42. See also Guthrie, *New Testament*, 872-77. Contra C. H. Dodd (*The Johannine Epistles* [Moffatt New Testament Commentary; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946]), who maintains that the similarities are due to imitation, and not common authorship.

¹⁷D. A. Carson, “The Johannine Writings,” in *NDBT*, 133. Carson rightly observes that such dualisms are not ontological, but formal.

¹⁸Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology* (trans. Andreas Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 124-25, 145-49.

¹⁹In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Paraclete (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), whereas in 1 John 2:1, it is Jesus who is called the Paraclete. This is not a contrast in John’s theology, however, given that he sees both the Son and the Spirit to be “called alongside” (i.e., Paraclete) as helper and advocate. Indeed, in John 14:16, the first occurrence of the term, Jesus says that he will send the Holy Spirit, who is *another helper*. Köstenberger avers that the Spirit’s role in and with believers demonstrates continuity between the pre- and post-glorification ministry of Jesus; this “helping presence” is what Jesus was when he was among his disciples (Kösten-

berger, *John*, 437; cf. 436 n. 70).

²⁰See John 1:14, 18 (variant reading); 3:16 and 1 John 4:9. The term here is *monogenēs*.

²¹Some date John’s Gospel before A.D. 70, such as J. A. T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976], 254-311), while others argue its being written well into the second century, and thus not by John the apostle. See for example Georg Strecker (*The Johannine Letters* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], xxxv-xlii).

²²Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxxii.

²³Eusebius, (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.3) cites Irenaeus, the second century bishop of Lyons (see also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.22.5; 3.3.4). Much of this information comes from a letter written from Polycrates (bishop of Ephesus) to Victor (bishop of Rome) in the late second century, which was later recorded by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.31.3; 5.24.2). See Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 675-76; Gary M. Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *DLNT*, 588, 595-96; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxxii; Marshall, *Epistles*, 47; Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 207-08; Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xxxii.

²⁴The use of the term “community” here is not meant to imply an acquiescence to the idea of a Johannine “school” that is behind the production of 1 John, currently a popular explanation as to the epistle’s authorship in many academic circles. Rather, what is meant is the group(s) of people that John taught and discipled while in Asia Minor

and those to whom he writes.

²⁵The verb “confess” (*homologeō*) is used more by John than any other New Testament author, and more in 1 John than in any other New Testament book.

²⁶Carson, “Johannine Writings,” 133; Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 206-08; Westcott, *The Epistles*, xxxii.

²⁷Brooke, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xxx.

²⁸Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, 120-24; Bruce, *Epistles*, 17.

²⁹Stott, *Epistles of John*, 41.

³⁰See John 21:15-17. It would not at all be surprising to find Jesus’ commands to shepherd and tend his “lambs” taking root in John’s own life and ministry. Though Jesus’ commands were specifically addressed to Peter, other disciples were present (John 21:12-15), including John (v. 20).

³¹Burge, “John, Letters of,” 588. Such a heterogeneous group would be fitting given that Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church was arguably written both to Jewish and Gentile Christians.

³²For example, John’s “Jewishness” is demonstrable in 1:7, where imagery and language from the Levitical sacrificial system is evident. The “cleansing” (*katharizei*) function of “blood” (*haima*) for “every sin” (*pasēs hamartias*) that comes from the single sacrifice of Christ (cp. John 1:29, where Christ is the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”) is very Johannine, and very Jewish. Both forgiveness and cleansing are necessary and are supplied in the work of Christ

(see 1:9 where they are mentioned together). “Cleansing” (*katharizei*), the main verb of the final clause of v. 7, is a term frequently found in Leviticus (LXX). See for example its first occurrence in Lev 8:15 (“Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it.”), and note the parallel ideas with John’s usage such as the cleansing function of the blood of the sacrifice for sin. It is telling that Christ is the single propitiatory sacrifice in both 1 John and the Gospel of John. Thus, John’s doctrine of the atonement is rooted in a Jewish Old Testament understanding of sin, sacrifice, and Levitical cleansing from sin.

³³Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 207.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 208.

³⁵Brown, *Epistles*, 101. Brown argues that the apostle John is not the author.

³⁶Brown suggests that it is more likely that 1 John was addressed “to Christians in one place, presumably the ‘mother’ Johannine group that spawned the Johannine churches in the outlying areas” (Brown, *Epistles*, 89), and not a circular letter *per se*. He adds that the Christian readers of 1 John “may have met in many different house-churches in the one city” (89 n. 200; cf. 101-02). Such is not a radically different idea than that presented above.

³⁷Bruce, *Epistles*, 14.

³⁸Stott, *Epistles of John*, 41.

³⁹Paul Feine and Johannes Behm,

Introduction to the New Testament (ed. Werner Georg Kümmel; trans. A. J. Mattill, Jr.; 14th rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 309; Marshall, *Epistles*, 14.

⁴⁰Contra Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 16. See also idem, “‘Authority to Become Children of God’: A Study of 1 John,” *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981): 210-28. Lieu asserts that the epistle should not be seen as a polemic against heresy, and avers that this framework is not compelling given that such rigid codes of “orthodoxy vs. heresy” were not yet in place when 1 John was likely written. While Lieu is correct that many definitions of what was and what was not orthodox Christian teaching had not yet been developed (given that there were no formal church creeds, councils, or even a completed and agreed upon “New Testament” to which one could appeal), it is a mistake to assert, therefore, that John could not have been delineating between right and false teaching (i.e., heresy and orthodoxy). Carson and Moo (*Introduction*, 681) criticize Smalley for making a similar argument and note that such is difficult to maintain given that Paul himself had done this almost fifty years earlier in his letters to the Galatians (1:8-9) and 2 Corinthians (11:4).

Kruse agrees with the assessment maintained here, and points to the apostle’s own words. John states those that had departed the community (2:19) were antichrists (2:18; 4:3) and false prophets (4:1). Such descriptions certainly sound

polemical! In short, Kruse concludes that these references “do seem to indicate that the author had a polemic purpose in writing” (Kruse, *Letters*, 16 n. 23). Guthrie notes that there was a “pressing need for presentation of adequate Christian antidotes to combat the danger” of religious syncretism, and the apostle recognized this (Guthrie, *New Testament*, 866-67). Cf. Terry Griffith, “A Non-Polemical Reading of 1 John: Sin, Christology and the Limits of Johannine Christianity,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 275. For more on the “adversaries,” see Brown, *Epistles*, 47-68.

⁴¹D. A. Carson, “The Johannine Letters,” in *NDBT*, 354.

⁴²E. Kauder, “Antichrist,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:125-26.

⁴³Kruse, *Letters*, 15. See Kruse (16-18) for a “judicious mirror reading” of 1 John, from which Kruse ascertains the teaching of the secessionists. Such a mirror reading perhaps goes too far.

⁴⁴Brooke, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xxx.

⁴⁵For further discussion see Kruse, *Letters*, 16-18; Brown, *Epistles*, 47-68; 505; esp. 762-63; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 677-82; Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 17-24; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxiii-xxv; Marshall, *Epistles*, 14-22; John Painter, “The ‘Opponents’ in 1 John,” *New Testament Studies* 32, no. 1 (1986): 48-71; Hans-Josef Klauck, “Internal Opponents: The Treatment of the Secessionists in the First Epistle of John,” in *Truth and Its Victims* (ed. W. Beuken, S. Freyne,

and A. Weiler; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 55-65.

⁴⁶For further suggestions, see Marshall, *Epistles*, 14-21. Others have suggested that what is being combated is an overreading, misreading, or “progressive reading” of parts of John’s Gospel (James Leslie Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* [2nd ed.; Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London: A & C Black, 1994], 14-20; see also Brown, *Epistles*, 69-71). For doing so, Brown has been charged with “considerable speculation and uncontrolled inferences” (Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 681).

Still others ask whether the early church heresy of the Ebionites is in view. Ebionites essentially were Jews with low Christology. They could have some belief in Jesus as the expected Old Testament Messiah and Davidic king, but not Messiah in the sense of *the* Messiah—the incarnate divine Son of God who has come in the flesh (Brown, *Epistles*, 53). They rejected such notions as the divinity and preexistence of Jesus, perhaps due to a fear of what might lead to “ditheism” (two Gods). However, the Ebionite suggestion is less likely given that John’s opponents seemed to have Christology that was too *high* (overemphasizing the divinity of Christ to the detriment of his humanity) and not too *low* (overemphasizing the humanity of Christ to the detriment of his divinity). In either case, they did not accept the teaching concerning Jesus Christ passed on by the apostle John.

⁴⁷Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 678.

⁴⁸See esp. Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 17-24. Schnackenburg argues that Docetism is more likely in view than the views of Cerinthus (esp. 21-23). Yet in the end, he concludes that no specific group should be identified (23), though he does see pre-gnostic tendencies in John’s adversaries (24).

⁴⁹See esp. Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 20-21; cf. Marshall, *Epistles*, 19; Kruse, *Letters*, 21-24.

⁵⁰Irenaeus was the second century bishop of Lyons, and Eusebius was a fourth century church historian. A well-known story handed down from Eusebius attributed to Polycarp says that the apostle John in fact knew Cerinthus. On one occasion John went to the bathhouse in Ephesus only to find that Cerinthus was inside. Upon learning that this “enemy of the truth” was inside, the apostle ran out terrified saying that at any moment God could lay waste to the entire bathhouse since “the heretic was inside.”

⁵¹F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* [ODCC] (ed. E. A. Livingstone; 3rd ed.; Oxford: University Press, 1997), s.v. “Cerinthus.”

⁵²Kruse, *Letters*, 21. Westcott, writing in the 1880’s, seems comfortable attributing the heretical teachings to Cerinthus (*Epistles*, xxxii), though he does so without discussion. See also Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 213-14. Marshall (*Epistles*, 17) observes that this is indeed a view with a wide amount of support, though rightly (we conclude) disagrees that Cerinthus was explicitly in John’s sights.

⁵³See Brown, *Epistles*, 723-39.

⁵⁴The difficulties of definition are seen in E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 14-19.

⁵⁵Cross, *ODCC*, s.v. "Gnosticism."

⁵⁶Hengel is critical of scholars who would assert *any* gnostic influence in *any* part of the New Testament and hopes that such "gnostic fever" will completely disappear from NT studies as a whole (Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: the Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* [trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976], 33 n. 66). In contrast, earlier New Testament theologies such as the able work of Adolf Schlatter did assert full-blown Gnosticism (Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, 120-21), but more recent theologies have concluded that Gnosticism did not ripen until the late second century A.D. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts in the 1940's has aided this investigation. By way of contrast, George Eldon Ladd appears to propound an early form of Gnosticism while not using the nomenclature "proto-Gnosticism" (G. E. Ladd, *New Testament Theology* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 657-59).

⁵⁷Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 681.

⁵⁸See especially Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909). For an overview of these three tests, see Carson, "Johannine Letters," 352-54.

⁵⁹Stott, *Epistles*, 153.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 152.

⁶¹Carson, "Johannine Letters," 353. See also Kistemaker, *James, Epistles*

of John, Peter and Jude, 220-21; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 616.

⁶²Carson, "Johannine Letters," 354. Paul puts it similarly, using the phrase "good works" in Eph 2:8-10.

⁶³Kruse, *Letters*, 173-74. See also Schlatter's discussion concerning faith in 1 John (*Theology of the Apostles*, 124-29).

⁶⁴See also 1 John 3:18. This is remarkably similar to James 2:14-26, where James writes that "faith without works is dead."

⁶⁵There is some discussion over the explicit content of the commandments in view here, as well as whose commandments they are. The question is whether these are the commandments of the Father or of the Son? Yet one must first ask if this is the best question. Would John make such a dichotomy between commands issued from one member of the Godhead or another? Jesus kept the commands of the Father, and as such, believers ought to walk just as he walked (2:6). Is obeying Jesus different than obeying the Father? Kruse's explanation that what is in view here is merely the Father's command (singular) to believe in the Son (3:23) is reductionistic (*Letters*, 78-79). This is especially true when one considers that "commandments" is plural (*tas entolas autou*) in 3:22 and 3:24.

What is at issue in this discussion is the larger issue of how New Covenant believers relate to the Old Testament commandments. Who exactly does "him" refer to in 2:3,

God the Father or Christ the Son? Were John to mean God's commandments, then he could well be referring to the "Ten Words," i.e., the Ten Commandments. If Christ's commands are in view, then the love command is likely in the spotlight. There is neither time nor space here to discuss the matter fully, given that the discussion centers on the difficult question of how the Mosaic Law relates to Christians. Commentators and scholars are divided over this issue, and this question undergirds discussion of 1 John 2:3ff. The view held here is that John is referring to God the Father in 2:3, and this is reinforced by 3:19-24 where God the Father's commandments are in view. The view maintained here is that there is a connection between keeping His word/commands (2:4, 5) and the "Ten Words" given through Moses (see the excellent discussion in Brown, *Epistles*, 250-52; cf. T. R. Schreiner, "Law," in *DLNT*, 645-46). These are not in tension with the love commandment of Christ (see John 13:34-35), given that the whole Law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, is kept in the believer when he or she loves God and neighbor (cf. Matt 22:36-40). Further, the commandments of Father and Son are not kept by one's own strength, but because of the work of the rebirth that God has accomplished in all who believe (5:1-2, 4), and the presence of God's seed (the Holy Spirit) that remains in every Christian (3:9).

⁶⁶See Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect* (Oxford: University Press, 1991),

215-17. The grammatical usage arguably here is a customary present. However, for an alternate view, see the discussion of these present tense verbs as possible gnomic presents in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 523-25. See also Kruse, *Letters*, 126-32.

⁶⁷Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated By Examples* (trans. and adapted by Joseph Smith; Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 82; Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights Into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1965), 151.

⁶⁸Burge, *Letters*, 150.

⁶⁹See the brief but helpful discussion by Baugh (S. M. Baugh, *A First John Reader: Intermediate Greek Reading Notes and Grammar* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1999], 50-52). Baugh's excursus, "The Present Infinitive and Perfectionism," considers the context, lexical meaning, and the grammatical construction. Though acknowledging the criticisms of the "customary/habitual" view, he concludes that it is in fact persuasive on these three considerations.

⁷⁰See the study of Inman (Kerry Inman, "Distinctive Johannine Vocabulary and the Interpretation of 1 John 3:9," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 [1977-78]: 136-44), who downplays the argument surrounding the tense of the verbs, yet comes to the same interpretation by demonstrating that when John uses the expression "doing sin" the apostle is referring to habitual/customary sin. For further discussion see the excursus on the topic of sinless perfection in Kruse, *Letters*, 126-32.

⁷¹For instance, the aorist infinitive (rather than the present) could have been used to complete the idea of the verb (Baugh, *Reader*, 52).

⁷²Smalley (*1, 2, 3 John*, 159-65), after criticizing the grammatical view, lists almost a dozen other explanations, as well as his own. Cf. Dodd, *Johannine*, 80; Marshall, *Epistles*, 180. Marshall's question concerning why it is that God could not protect the believer even from occasional sins misses the point, since occasional sins is exactly what is in mind in 1:9 and 2:1. Further, the matter of God's ability is not in question. For a longer survey of seven groups of interpretive options see Brown, *Epistles*, 412-17.

⁷³Or perhaps an eschatological ideal that has broken into the present. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 525. Wallace argues that these are gnomic present tense verbs, which express timeless, proverbial truths. Kubo seems to argue for the "ideal" view. See Sakae Kubo, "1 John 3:9: Absolute or Habitual?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 7 (1969): 47-56; cf. Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 257-58.

⁷⁴Marshall, *Epistles*, 183.

⁷⁵Burge, *Letters*, 150. Burge does not choose between the two interpretive options that he presents.

⁷⁶See Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 163; R. E. Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 126.

⁷⁷Further, this distinction between the two groups is seen in the chiasmic structure of verse 9 that stresses the *reason* for the distinction between the two groups—one has the "seed of God" in him while

the other does not. Note the chiasmic structure:

- A. The one who has been born of God
- B. Does not practice sin
- C. (Why?) Because his seed abides in him
- B'. He is not able to continue to sin
- A'. Because he has been born of God

The "seed" is likely the Holy Spirit that resides within believers. See Brown, *Epistles*, 410-11. Such an interpretation was held by Calvin and Beza and is found very frequently today. Brown stresses the New Covenant setting of 1 John, and sees Ezek 36:26-27 as forming a backdrop in the author's thought here as well as in John 3:5, where the Spirit is tied to the act of begetting. It is quite possible that John is relating the act of divine begetting, the indwelling seed of God and the indwelling Spirit. Because of the abiding Spirit the believer cannot continue in sin, since the Spirit is that of truth and is the opponent of sin. Mills, too, finds a chiasm here (Donald Mills, "The Holy Spirit in 1 John," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 [1999]: 37).

⁷⁸Carson, "Johannine Letters," 353. In fact, all three are so inseparable that Carson avers that there are really three facets to one comprehensive vision. See also Schlatter (*Theology of the Apostles*, 123) who writes that the awakening of love in the believer guarantees "that one's actions would now be pure and fruitful."

⁷⁹Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*,

123.

⁸⁰First John has 105 verses, and on average “love” appears in roughly one out of every three verses in either its verb form or noun form. Clearly for the apostle, no matter what his topic, love is never far from his mind.

⁸¹To be sure, John is not making an ontological statement about God. Rather, he is highlighting the fact that to love is to act on behalf of others, which is supremely revealed in the sending of the Son by the Father. See Kruse, *Letters*, 157, 160.

⁸²Mark A. Seifrid, “Propitiation,” in *DLNT*, 281-82. Seifrid affirms that both elements of removal of divine wrath (propitiation) and cleansing from guilt and sin (expiation) are in view in John’s use of the term *hilasmos* (2:2; 4:10). The term is variously translated as “propitiation” (NASB, ESV, HCSB), “atoning sacrifice” (NIV, NRSV), “sacrifice” (NLT), and “expiation” (RSV) in 4:10 (cf. 2:2). The NIV/NRSV reading is preferable since “atoning sacrifice” can express both aspects. Seifrid avers that in 1 John, death is the consequence of disobedience and unbelief and the result of divine judgment (282). Kruse agrees (*Letters*, 34-35; esp. 75-76).

⁸³This is God’s love for us ([subjective genitive] Stott, *Epistles*, 164; Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 182 n. 124; Kruse, *Letters*, 162 n. 184) and not our love for God ([objective genitive] Dodd, *Johannine*, 113), or a God-like love ([genitive of quality] Law, *Tests*, 399; Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 241; Westcott, *Epistles*, 152). Marshall (*Epistles*, 217) combines the first and

third possibilities. Smalley does not think that the biblical author would have made such distinctions, therefore he leaves it ambiguous (*1, 2, 3 John*, 248).

⁸⁴Akin rightly describes the perfection/completion in view here as the achievement of a goal, namely, that believers love one another (*1, 2, 3 John*, 182). God’s love is seen today in believers’ love for one another (Stott, *Epistles*, 163). Recall 2:5, where the perfection of God’s love is seen in the *obedience* of the believer (Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 248; Dodd, *Johannine*, 113). Again, John’s three tests are interlocked.

⁸⁵Kruse, *Letters*, 158.

⁸⁶Carson, “Johannine Letters,” 353.

⁸⁷See the excurses by Kruse (*Letters*, 151-55) and Schnackenburg (*Johannine*, 191-95).

⁸⁸On the rare title “Holy One,” see John 6:69 and Rev 3:7 where it refers to Christ. Outside of John’s writings, see also Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34, and Acts 3:14. However, Akin rightly cautions a strict distinction between the Godhead in such matters given their intimate fellowship, so clearly described in John’s writings (Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 119).

⁸⁹The majority of commentators are agreed on this interpretation. For an exception see Ignace de la Potterie, “Anointing of the Christian by Faith,” in *The Christian Lives by the Spirit* (ed. I. Potterie and S. Lyonnet; trans. John Morross; New York: Alba House, 1971), 101-08, 114-15. Potterie combines the Spirit and the word, seeing the anointing here as the (Spirit-inspired) word of truth received by faith, giving priority to

the word. See also Dodd (*Johannine*, 63), who argues that it is the gospel word. Note the rebuttal of Dodd and Potterie by Marshall (*Epistles*, 154-55) and Kruse (*Letters*, 109-110).

⁹⁰Strecker, *Johannine*, 65-66.

⁹¹Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 105.

⁹²Carson, “Johannine Letters,” 354.

⁹³See above, note 77. See Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 141; Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 118; Brown, *Epistles*, 410-11; Kruse, *Letters*, 154.

⁹⁴Kruse, *Letters*, 154.

⁹⁵Perhaps the best survey of the structural options is found in Akin’s commentary (*1, 2, 3 John*, 37-48), followed by that of Marshall (*Epistles*, 22-27) and Brown (*Epistles*, 764). Brown is helpful in that he puts into chart form the divisions of over 30 different scholars.

⁹⁶See Kruse (*Letters*, 31, 49), and Marshall (*Epistles*, 22-27), for example. Marshall concludes that 1 John is “not meant to be divided into large sections on a logical basis” (26). He does not conclude that the epistle is illogical, however, but simply that 1 John is a series of connected paragraphs governed by an association of ideas (26).

⁹⁷Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 37. Cf. Burge, “John, Letters of,” 597. Smalley notes the difficulty and says hyperbolically that there are as many outlines of 1 John as there are those outlining it (Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxxiii). Houlden calls 1 John a “puzzling work” when it comes to matters of structure (Houlden, *Commentary*, 22).

⁹⁸Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 669.

⁹⁹Some begin the epilogue at 5:14 instead of 5:13.

¹⁰⁰Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 669. Smalley maintains this approach (1, 2, 3 *John*, xxxiii).

¹⁰¹John 1:1-18 (prologue); 1:19-12:50 (Book of Signs); 13:1-20:31 (Book of Glory); 21:1-25 (epilogue). See Köstenberger, *John*, vii.

¹⁰²Brown, *Epistles*, 124.

¹⁰³See Brown (*Epistles*, 122-29), Burge ("John, Letters of," 597; idem, *Letters*, 42-45), and Akin (1, 2, 3 *John*, 46-48). Such an outline can be traced to the French scholar Feuillet (A. Feuillet, "Structure of 1 John," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3, no. 2 [1973]: 194-216).

¹⁰⁴Brown, *Epistles*, 124.

¹⁰⁵Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, v-viii. Others divide parts 1 and 2 after 2:27, 28, or 29, and parts 2 and 3 after 4:6. See Brown, *Epistles*, 124.

¹⁰⁶Schnackenburg, *Johannine*, 12-13. Yet see Westcott (*Epistles*, xlvi-xlvii) who divides the epistle into three slightly different sections: 1:1-2:17; 2:18-4:6; 4:7-5:21. Westcott does not separate the prologue and epilogue as do most.

¹⁰⁷Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 669-70; Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 224-26. Kistemaker retains yet renames these divisions. For the many others who hold a tripartite division of 1 John, see the chart in Brown, *Epistles*, 124. It is also reproduced in full in Akin's commentary where the reader can find an excellent discussion of the matter (Akin, 1, 2, 3 *John*, 37-38). For further study, see the works of D. T.-C. Wu ("An Analysis of the Structure of 1 John Using Discourse Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), and H. W. York, "An Analysis and

Synthesis of the Exegetical Methods of Rhetorical Criticism and Discourse Analysis as Applied to the Structure of 1 John," Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

¹⁰⁸Westcott, *Epistles*, xlvi. Westcott argues for a three-part division with breaks after 2:17 and 4:6.