

1 John

1:1. “beginning.” Occasionally someone will become confused by the word “beginning” in verse one 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 (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*).

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

1:3. “so that you also may have fellowship with us.” This important concept is often overlooked in Christian circles: true fellowship is based upon like-mindedness.

John is writing to fellow Christians whom he has discipled and is 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*; 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 a disciple. John had mentored these disciples and was writing to them as a concerned father. (We should note that the meaning of “children” changes in 2:12 and 13 from a beloved disciple to someone who is 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 which 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 2:12 and 13 would be easily noticed and caused no problems for the reader).

John is writing to people he has personally discipled and loves dearly, so he is not writing to get them saved. His disciples have been under assault. “Many antichrists” had

arisen (2:18), and “went out from us,” meaning they had once been fellowshiping 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 (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.

John’s beloved disciples were being confused by these deceived Christians who were now 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 (5:21). Thus John is writing to shore up or re-establish like-mindedness with his beloved disciples so that he and they could have “fellowship,” (full sharing). John knows what many Christian 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 says 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 sustained “full sharing” (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.

1:4. 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 (cp. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). 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.

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.

1:5. “message.” From the Greek word *aggelia* (#31 ἀγγελία). The messenger is the *aggelos* and the message he brings is the *aggelia*. Interestingly, this word only occurs twice, here and in 1 John 3:11.

“God is light.” This is the figure of speech *metaphor*. 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 (*Figures of Speech*; “Anthropopatheia”). 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 (cp. 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 shown 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 Revelation 20:2). **1:7.** “continue to walk...continues to cleanse.” 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 (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*). 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 note on 1 Pet. 1:2 on how the blood of Jesus can continuously cleanse us over a period of time.

2:1. “will not sin.” Cp. NIV translation. This phrase is a *hina* + subjunctive purpose clause (see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled”). 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.”

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* (BDAG). Louw 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.

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.”

2:8. “at the same time.” 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].

2:16. “pride in possessions.” Although many versions say “life” and not “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 possessions continues the thought. Cp. “τοῦ βίου *pride in one’s possessions* 1J 2:16” (BDAG). Also, the context is important. Verse 15 directs us to not love the things in the world, and verse 17 reminds us that this world is passing away.

2:19. “with the result.” The Greek is a *hina* + subjunctive result clause (cp. the translation of NIV; NRSV; NAB; which show result). See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” These false believers had no purpose in mind when they left. They did not intend of showing that they did not truly belong, as some translations infer: e.g., “*they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us” (NASB).

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).

2:20. “you all know.” The reading of the KJV and ASV versions, “You know all things” is based on a Greek text not considered original. The original was changed from *oidate pantas* (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 (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). What we know is left unspecific because it refers generally to what was “known” in the context; in verse 18 we “know it is the last hour” because of all those who are anti-christ. In the following verse, v.21, it goes on to say, “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it”; on the other hand those who are antichrist deny the father and the son (v.22).

3:2. “it is revealed.” The Greek verb is *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερώω [fan-er-o'-o]), 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, favors “it.” The first time *phaneroō* appears in the verse, it is referring to the fact that what we will be, our new glorified bodies, have not yet been revealed. The second is referring 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 (cp. NAB; NET; Darby), “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” (Robertson, *Word Pictures*; *Vincent’s Word Studies*; *Wuest’s Word Studies*)

3:3. “fixed on Him.” The hope referred to in this verse flows from the immediate context of Christ’s appearing and our new bodies. 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.” This verse is not saying, “Whoever has this hope in himself,” as the more ambiguous KJV, NRSV, and NIV rendering (“has this hope in him”) could be read to mean. Rather, it is the same Greek phrase, *ep’ autō*, that appears in Romans 15:12, “...the Gentiles will hope in him [Christ]” (See also: Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:6).

From verse two, 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 4:17).

3:6. “continues sinning.” In this section the Greek is very clear, but it is challenging to translate it into English. In verses 6-9, the word “sin” when it is a verb, or the verb *poieo*, “to do, to make,” when it is paired with “sin” or “righteousness,” are active verbs in the present tense. The impact of this cannot be overstressed. For example, it misses the point of the Greek entirely to say, “He who commits sin is of the devil,” (1 John 3:8a RSV), as if committing a sin made a person of the devil. The Greek active present means: “He who keeps committing sin,” or “He who makes a practice of sin,” or, “He who continually commits sin,” or, “He who is continually sinning,” etc. The devil makes a habitual practice of committing sin, and those who do the same are of the devil.

3:8. “makes a practice of sinning.” See note on verse 6.

“has been sinning from the beginning.” 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 (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 519-20). 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.”

“destroy.” The Greek word is *luō* (#3089 λῶ), 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.

3:9. “make a practice of sin.” See note on verse 6.

3:12. “slaughter.” There are several Greek words for kill or murder. God could have used any of these other words (e.g., ἀποκτείνω, ἀναιρέω, διαχειρίζομαι, 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 Able, which has to do with both sacrifices offered and Abel’s spilt 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; cp. 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).

3:14. “*brothers.*” The object of the participle “loving” was left out of the verse, an instance of the figure of speech ellipsis (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). Many western texts added the word for brother to this verse to clarify the figure (cp. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). We have decided to put “brothers” in italics to complete the thought of the participle, which is evident from the context. The figure is sandwiched between the previous clause, which says, “We know... because we love the brothers,” and verse 15 that begins with “Whoever keeps on hating his brother...” It is clear, then, that the end of verse 14 is speaking of “Whoever does not love [the brothers].”

3:16. “for us.” This phrase comes from the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “on behalf of” (with the genitive, *hēmōn* = us), and can also mean “instead of” (Robertson, *Grammar*, 630-31). 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 ὀφείλω), designates an “obligation; as *debt*; that which one ought to do, *duty*” (BDAG). 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 *psuche* (#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 everyday 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.

3:17. “the world’s goods.” The Greek reads, “the life of the world” using one of the definitions of “life” (*bios*) that means sustenance in life, the material things of life.

3:19. “assure.” This verb becomes very interesting in this context. It comes from the Greek word *peitho* (#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” (BDAG). 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 (v.16), not closing our bowels of compassion (v.17), loving one another in deed and truth (v.18), and obeying his commandments (vv.22-23). Living according to God’s will sets our hearts at ease before him and give us confidence for prayer and assurance for the Judgment. Yet, if our heart does condemn us, God is still

greater than our hearts (v.20), though we may not have confidence in this case. (See 4:17, note on “brought to its goal with us”).

3:22. “keep asking...keep receiving...continuously keep...keep doing.” 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 (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 520-22). 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’” (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 521). 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; Mk. 11:25; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:7).

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” (*Word Studies*, 50). (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).

3:24. “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, 4:13 note on “of his spirit” and our work, *The Gift of Holy Spirit*, pp. 34-40; Bullinger, *Companion Bible; Word Studies on Holy Spirit*.

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 Cor. 14:12, 32; 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (see notes on those verses), and Isaiah 11:4. It is a metonymy, “spirit” being put for the manifestations of holy spirit. In this case the context makes it clear that “spirit” refers specifically to prophecies. 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.

The beauty of the metonymy is that it leaves the door open for primary meanings and secondary meanings both being 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.

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 note on 4:1.

“acknowledges.” The Greek is *homologeō* (#3670 ὁμολογέω), and can mean “confess,” “profess,” “declare,” “acknowledge.” Here, “acknowledge” is the meaning of the word. True prophecy *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 verse 3.

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 note on 4:1.

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

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 [4:3, 5-6]). The key to this victory is laid out in 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.

4:5. “of the world... from the world.” Commentators seem to be in agreement that these two phrases are both genitives of origin (Lenski; Meier). They are “of the world” and not

“of God” (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).

4:10. “atoning sacrifice.” See note on 1 John 2:2.

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 (Robertson, *Grammar*). In this case, God has the totality of spirit and gives us some of it.

4:14. “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 (Wuest). 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.

4:17. “brought to its goal with us.” Verses 16-18 expounds upon what is mentioned in 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, *teleioo* (#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.

“**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 *parresia* (#3954; 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, even so 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. (cp. Lenski for the italics and sense. Cp. also Alford, *The Greek Testament*).

4:18. “love.” Specifically, the Greek has the definite article, “the love,” or as Lenski, “this love.” 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’” (*Meyer’s Commentary*).

“has punishment.” Vincent writes: “‘Torment’ is a faulty translation. The [Greek] word means, ‘punishment, penalty.’ ... Note the present tense ‘hath,’ 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” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*). ”

Fear has punishment now, in anticipation of the Day of Judgment, which is what the context is talking about (v. 17.). When we are perfected (brought to maturity) in love, we do not have any fear regarding the Day of Judgment.

“punishment.” This particular word for punishment (#2851 *kolasis*) 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.”

4:21. “must love his brother also.” The Greek is a *hina* + subjunctive command clause. See commentary on John 13:34, John 9:3.

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 Calvinist’s 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.

5:4. “overcomes.” See 4:4 note on “have overcome.”

5:5. “overcoming.” See 4:4 note on “have overcome.”

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. (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

5:18. “everyone who is born [*gegenēmenos*] of God [i.e., the Christian] does not keep on sinning, but he who has been 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 (passive) 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 (See, Robertson, *Word Pictures*). 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 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 useage 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 which 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 (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). 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” (Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 71). 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 (cp. Psalm 121:4-5), and Jesus prays for the the Father to keep his diciples 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).

“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 (Bullinger, *Figures*). The “evil one,” the Devil, harms Christians all the time. However, because their salvation is assured, he cannot harm them eternally, only in this life. Therefore, any harm he does is considered as nothing when compared to eternity. Thus the phrase, “the evil one does not touch him,” causes us to look at our lives from an eternal, not temporal, perspective.

5:19. “the wicked one,” see note on Matthew 6:13. For this being a reference to the world lying under the power of the evil one see Alfred’s Greek New Testament.

2 John

1:1. “chosen.” From the Greek adjective, *eklektos* (#1588 ἐκλεκτός). See entry on 2 Timothy 2:10.

“**lady.**” From the Greek *kupia* (#2959 κυρία), this word is the feminine form of *kupios*, “Lord.” “Lady” is used in the sense of a woman who is in authority or control of a household or holds a position of authority in government. The terminology “lords and ladies” was commonly used of the ruling class of society at the time of the writing of the King James Version. Therefore, the meaning “lady” as one who ruled over others was much clearer during the time of King James, when the culture of lords and ladies was much more prominent. Today, however, the term “lady” usually brings to mind a “well mannered woman” regardless of authority status, although being a woman of authority is still part of the English meaning of the word.

The majority of Lexicographers believe the term is used metaphorical for the church (BDAG; Louw-Nida; TDNT; Gringrich; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*) and we agree with this for a number of reasons. The adjective “elect” is used of a church in 1 Peter 5:13; in Galatians 4:22-31 the church (new covenant) is referred to as our mother, while we, its members, are the children. However, Thayer and Vine maintain that it is a proper noun, *Cyria*; that is, the name of an actual woman to whom the epistle is addressed. However, this is contradicted by BDAG which claims it is late and rare as a proper name. Others hold that it is simply a general designation for an unspecified woman. Although it is possible, but not likely, that there was a woman to whom the epistle was addressed, if that is the case then she and the authority she held would represent the authority of the church in which she had authority, which would have been a “mother” church.

1:2. “abides.” The Greek word *menō* (#3306 μένω) has the basic meaning of “remain.” It can mean “remain” as in, “live, dwell” or “continue, stay.” Here it means both, for the truth lives in and also remains (stays) in the believer. In English, “abides,” captures both senses of remaining and living.

1:4. “some of your children.” This is the genitive of partition, which indicates a part of some greater whole by putting the larger group in the genitive case (Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, §90). In this instance the larger whole would be all the children, some of which John found walking in the truth. This is a statement of encouragement and reproof at the same time. It is encouraging that some of the “children” were walking in truth but reproof that some of them had turned away from the truth. This verse is good evidence that the “lady” 2 John is addressed to is a “mother church” and not a person because there would certainly be no need for John to write a mother and point out to her that “some” of her children were walking in the truth. She would be aware of that, whereas that fact would not be as obvious to an entire church due to the differences in opinion that always exist in any given congregation.

1:5-6. At first these verses can seem a bit circular; the commandment is to love, and love is to walk according to the commandments. However this is easily understood when we realize the difference between the command (singular) and the commandments (plural), and that this is a reference to Christ’s summing up of the Law and Prophets spoken of in Matthew 22:37-40: “Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And

the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The command (singular) is to walk in love, but how do we do that? By walking according to Jesus’ commandments (plural) that sum up the whole of the law. So we see that the plurality of commandments can be summed up in love, and love encompasses all the commandments.

1:8. “we worked for.” John is saying that ministers are co-laborers, working towards a full reward for believers (cp. 1 Cor. 3:5-15; 2 Cor. 1:24; Phil. 2:16). There is a textual variation that reads, “What you worked for,” using “you” not “we,” (NIV). Although, this reading has considerable textual support, it is less favored due to internal considerations (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). “We” is more likely to be original in that it is unlikely a copyist would have changed “you” to “we.” It makes sense, however, that a copyist would change “we” to match the second person verbs in the rest of the verse (“watch yourselves... you do not lose... you may receive”).

1:9. “going on ahead.” From the Greek *proago* (#4254 προάγω), “to take or lead from one position to another by taking charge, lead forward” (BDAG). When one takes charge and leads away from the teachings of Christ, he is taking the place of Christ (*antichrist* = instead of Christ), rather than submitting to the headship of the Lord by remaining in his teachings (cp. 1 Cor. 4:6). Christ is called the Good Shepherd who leads us as a flock; we are to follow him and not lead ourselves and others astray from his teachings (John 10:2-16).

1:10. “this teaching.” The teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (v.7).

“do not say a greeting to him.” This prohibition is not meant to be elitist or snobby, but to prevent the spread of false teachings. To give one “greetings,” from the Greek *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), would be to say, “rejoice, be glad,” when instead you ought to be rebuking and correcting such a one (Tit. 1:9). One Greek lexicon speaks of using *chairō* as “a formalized greeting wishing one well... in effect, to express that one is on good terms with the other” (BDAG). It is this associating oneself with the other on good terms that causes participation in their evil works (v. 11). God does not want us to just bear with people who preach a different Jesus or different gospel, pretending that nothing is wrong with their teaching, greeting them as friends and welcoming them into our homes. This gives an implicit endorsement of their false teaching; He rebuked the Corinthians for doing this very thing.

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough (NRSV).

Rather than just submit to false teaching, we are called to lovingly correct those who contradict sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9).

3 John

1:2. “I pray.” The Greek is *euchomai* (#2172 εὐχομαι) and expresses a prayer or a wish. Here it describes a wish or perhaps even more accurately, a desire. That desire is voiced in a prayer, so “pray” is a good translation, “wish” being too weak to properly communicate the emotion in this verse.

“all.” The Greek phrase is *peri panton* (περὶ πάντων), and most literally means, “concerning all” [thus, “concerning everything,” or “in respect to everything”]. It properly goes with the first infinitive verb, “go well with you,” and not the second, “be in health.” Thus, “Beloved, I pray that you do well in respect to everything,” would be very literal, but more difficult to read. “I pray that all may go well with you” catches the sense very nicely and is easy to read.

“may.” The subjunctive sense in this verse is picked up from “pray” (wish), not the verb “go well with.”

“goes well with you...well with your soul.” “Goes well,” and “is well” are both from the Greek verb, *euodoō* (#2137 εὐοδῶ), which is a compound word from the noun *hodos*, “road,” and the prefix *eu*, “good.” Often translated “to prosper,” this word literally means to “have a good road,” i.e., have an easy, successful path ahead of you. Although it can apply to financial prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2), it is not restricted to such; the term is much broader than that. It is used in Romans 1:10 in the context of things working out well, so the Apostle Paul could visit the Romans. Here in 3 John, “prosper” is to often thought to speak of money alone; the meaning is that John hopes things are going well for Gaius in every category of his life.

“good health.” The word *hugiaino* (#5198 ὑγιαίνω) has the basic meaning “to be whole, sound, free from error”; accordingly, when applied to the human body, it means “to be in good physical health, be healthy” (BDAG).

“soul.” The Greek is *psuche* (pronounced psou-kay’; #5590 ψυχή) and means “soul,” but the word “soul” has a large number of meanings, including the equivalent of the personal pronoun (thus, “my soul” equals “me”; Acts 2:27; Heb. 10:38), the life of the body, whether human or animal; the seat of the personality, the seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects; and more. In this case, the “life force” does not prosper, but rather the person prospers in the seat of his personality and being. The way to have things go well in our innermost person and personality is to be in a correct [truthful] relationship with God and the Lord Jesus, and humble and honest about ourselves. Our “soul” will not do well if we are lying to ourselves or our beliefs are based on falsehoods, even if we believe them correct. Truth, both doctrinal and relational, must be the basis of a soul that is prospering.

1:15. Some Greek texts combine verses 14 and 15, and so do not have a verse 15. We included it, following the Nestle-Aland Greek text and versions such as the ESV, NET, and NRSV.