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CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST AND THE SIN UNTO DEATH—WHEN SHOULD A BELIEVER NOT PRAY?

1 JOHN 5:13-21

Leo Percer¹

INTRODUCTION

John's instructions in 1 John 5:13-21 represent several well-known issues in New Testament studies. Writing on this passage could well feel like entering into an already raging battle. Opinions on this passage are almost as numerous as the authors who write about 1 John. About the only non-controversial aspect of these 9 verses involves the issue of confidence for Christians. The issue of assurance or confidence in knowing about eternal life (and other related issues) is a constant theme in 1 John. John consistently emphasizes the reality of salvation as coming through only one source—the incarnate Jesus, God in the flesh. This relationship with the incarnate God creates confidence in the life of the believer to the degree that he or she has a reasonable expectation that God will hear and respond to the believer's prayers. In chapter 5:13-21, however, John seems to raise an issue with this view by discussing a situation in which believers may not pray for others—when those others have committed the “sin unto death.” John's exclusive gospel seems challenged here if John is asking believers to avoid praying for other believers who have committed the “sin unto death.” A consideration of the context of John's brief epistle may yield clues to understanding this topic in a way that keeps confidence intact while challenging the attitudes and actions of the false teachers mentioned in 1 John. In fact, a close look at sections of 1 John 3 may well yield the exegetical clue for readers to better understand the controversial issues raised in 1 John 5. To accomplish this goal, a brief overview of John's letter will be given, some major themes will be delineated, and a comparison between the language and thought of chapters 3 and 5 will be offered. Then, with that information in hand, an interpretation of 1 John 5:13-21 will be attempted with special attention to the issues of confidence, prayer, and sin. An overview of John's letter will provide context for these later discussions.

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE PURPOSE AND THEMES OF 1 JOHN

Four times John refers to his writing “these things” to his readers. These four references record to some degree the purpose statement of this letter: 1:4; 2:1; 2:26; 5:13. Taking these statements together, John’s purpose may be expressed in two statements: 1) John addresses spiritual problems caused by the influence of false teaching, and 2) John attempts to reassure his people by establishing them in the truth.² So, one part of John’s purpose for writing is to counteract the false teachers and to address the spiritual issues that have arisen in the congregation as a result (cf. 1:3-4; 4:1; 5:13). This purpose is clearly stated in 2:26, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” This verse is a clear reference to false teachers (cf. 2:18; 4:1). John’s other purpose is to give his readers confidence or to reassure them by establishing them in the truth. This purpose is clearly stated in 5:13, “These things I have written to you, to those who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Here John links assurance of salvation to faith and sound doctrine. In other words, John writes because spiritual problems have arisen in this church due to false teaching. To combat those issues, he offers spiritual truth that leads to assurance and confidence. John intends to help his readers know that they have eternal life because of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ.³

John’s churches appear to be engaged in an ideological struggle that involves the possibility of interpreting the Christian faith as just another philosophy. More specifically, the problem revolves around the character of Jesus of Nazareth. Some were apparently saying that he was not the Son of God come in the flesh.⁴ There appears to be a doctrinal conflict in these churches, and this conflict is affecting the congregation negatively. Some folks have declared an elitist position that seems to put them in possession of “special knowledge” or “revelation” or even “anointing” that sets them off as better prepared than others (cf. 1 John 2:18-24; 27). These opponents of John also claim that Jesus was not really human. He only “appeared” to be human (i.e., Docetism). Like later Gnostics (and some Platonists or Neo-

² Christopher Bass, *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2008, 52; John Painter, *1, 2, 3 John*, Sacra Pagina, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008, 86; and I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, 53-54.

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 56-60; Bass, *That You May Know*, 53-54.

⁴ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 56-60; Bass, *That You May Know*, 38-40.

Platonists), they seem to claim that only spiritual things matter, therefore anything physical is suspected as evil.⁵ As a result, the Savior cannot be physical.⁶

John offers a different view to counteract that of the false teachers. He reminds his readers that truth is a solid foundation, and that proper attention to the truth will lead to confidence and joy. He assures his readers that a true relationship with the true God is only possible through the Incarnation of God in Jesus.⁷ Jesus is the only means of salvation, but for this salvation to be secured Jesus came as one of us. Faith in what Christ accomplished is the only means to salvation, and so that his readers could gain assurance in that salvation he offers a series of tests by which the readers might identify the false teachers and, at the same time, gain assurance of their salvation. Although the nature of these tests is debated, the tests appear to focus on three areas: theological, moral, and social.⁸ The theological area focuses on what is believed or the content of faith. The moral test addresses how humans should respond to God's demands. The social test addresses how John's readers should act towards others. In other words, the tests John uses to expose false teachers are the same tests he uses to identify genuine believers. By means to these tests, John wants to provide confidence to his readers by grounding them in truth. These tests also play the role of equipping John's readers against the false teaching and encouraging them to live properly as guided by their Christian training.

Unfortunately for modern interpreters these tests are not as clearly spelled out in the structure of John's letter. In fact, the structure of this letter is somewhat debated.⁹ This document reads more like a homily or exhortation than a letter, but the continued emphasis on John's "writing" to his readers indicates a decidedly epistolary endeavor (e.g., 1 John 1:4; 2:1, 7-8, 12-14, 21, 26; 5:13). John's letter indicates a few clear units that are set apart by subject matter (e.g., 2:12-14; 2:15-17; 4:1-6). As Brown points out, however, "these units have little apparent direct

⁵ Bass, *That You May Know*, 35-40; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51, Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1984, xxiv-xxvi.

⁶ John explicitly addresses this issue in 1 John 4.

⁷ Bass, *That You May Know*, 52-54, 88-94.

⁸ Painter, *1, 2, 3 John*, 116-118, 175-176. Painter examines Law's use of the idea of tests in 1 John but boils them down to two—a Christological test and an ethical test. The Christological test is the same as the theological one above. The ethical test is the social test. The moral test is in response to the theological one. For more on these tests, see R. Law, *The Three Tests of Life. A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909).

⁹ Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 2006, 116-130, gives the most extensive overview of the variety of approaches to the structure of 1 John.

connection with what has gone before and what comes after, and so their role in the plan of the letter is unclear.”¹⁰ Some sections show a particular writing pattern that seems to set them apart from the rest of the text (e.g., the use of Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν three times in 1 John 1:6ff), but even here there seems to be little indication of an intentional structuring by John.¹¹ About the only part of structure that is rarely debated is the place of the prologue in 1 John 1:1-4 and the epilogue in 1 John 5:13-21. The material between (1 John 1:5-5:12) finds almost as many outlines as there are commentators, and the various tests may also be found interspersed throughout this material. Perhaps the safest approach to understanding this document’s outline is a thematic one.

John utilizes several terms on a regular basis to emphasize certain themes in this letter. John often deals in contrasts like “light and darkness,” “life and death,” “righteousness and sin,” “truth and lies,” and “children of God and the children of the devil/world.” He also employs certain positive terms to describe Christian life such as: faith, confidence, eternal life, and knowledge/understanding (as assurance).¹² The contrasting terms are often used to expose the difference between the Christians of John’s churches and the opponents or false teachers who are teaching a different view than John. This use is most clearly seen in 1 John 3, where John delineates the differences between the children of God and the children of the devil. John discusses these differences in terms that are very similar to the language in 1 John 5:13-21.

In John 3:10, John offers a way to recognize the difference between God’s children and the devil’s children: “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest (or, obvious); everyone who does not do righteousness is not of God, and everyone who does not love his brother.” Contained in this chapter are other terms related to the differentiation of the children of God from the children of the devil: the children of God are born of God and do not practice sin (v. 9), children of God know that they have passed from death to life (v. 14), children of God know the truth (v. 19), the children of God have confidence before God and in prayer (vv. 21b-22), children of God believe in the name of God’s Son Jesus Christ (v. 23), and the children of God abide in Jesus and keep his commandments. The language of believing in the name of Jesus, knowing that one has life and confidence before God specifically in prayer, the contrast of life and death, the language of being “born of God” and “avoiding sin,” and the idea of abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in the believers are all ideas found similarly in 1

¹⁰Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 118.

¹¹Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 118. Note that Brown recognizes that many scholars use these frequent word collections as a reason to argue for redactors in some cases.

¹²Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxx-xxxi; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 73-86.

John 5. In fact, the language of chapters 3 and 5 is very similar. These chapters deal with similar topics and may offer insights into each other. A quick term search finds that chapters 3 and 5 are the only two chapters that deal specifically with the ideas of confidence, belief in Jesus' name, life, death, sin, and prayer. Could chapter 3 be a key to understanding the language of chapter 5 especially with reference to the "sin unto death" issue? This conclusion seems possible and a reading of 1 John 5:13-21 will be offered with an emphasis on the similarities between it and 1 John 3:9-24.¹³

EXEGESIS OF 1 JOHN 5:13-21

As the first four verses of 1 John 1 form a type of prologue for this letter, so also the last nine verses of 1 John 5 represent a type of epilogue.¹⁴ This passage divides effectively into four parts: 1) the purpose statement for John's letter (v. 14), 2) confidence in prayer (vv. 15-17), 3) confidence in Christian living (vv. 18-20), and 4) a final warning (v. 21). Each section (with the possible exception of number 4) has some linguistic or thematic connections to chapter 3. Each section will be taken in turn and interpreted with special reference to its connection (and/or clarification) by the materials of chapter 3.

John begins his epilogue with a purpose statement (5:13).¹⁵ This verse seems to serve as the purpose statement for the whole book, while 1 John 5:14-21 offer a summary of sorts of the themes of 1 John. John's purpose for writing is to reassure his readers and to give them confidence in their salvation and relationship to God. John identifies his audience when he states that he writes to those "who

¹³ For a representation of the possible relationship between 1 John 3:9-24 and 1 John 5:13-21, see Appendix A.

¹⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of 1 John, Part 10: An Exposition of 1 John 5:13-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July 1990), 147; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 188; B. F. Wescott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, 188; Judith Lieu, *I, II, III John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 220; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 630; Painter, *1, 2, 3 John*, 313; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 243; Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, New American Commentary, Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001, 203.

¹⁵ Some questions exist regarding whether verse 13 should be connected to 1 John 5:1-12 or be seen as a purpose statement for the entire document. See previous note for those who see v. 13 as a purpose statement for the whole book. For opposing views, see Stott, *The Letters of John*, 186-187; and Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 289-291.

believe in the name of the Son of God.”¹⁶ John uses “name” three times in 1 John: 2:12; 3:23; and 5:13. The first reference is to forgiveness of sins “for his name’s sake.” The second two specify the object of the name—Jesus. In 5:13, John says that he has written to those “who believe in the name of the Son of God.” First John 3:23 states that the proper response to God’s commandments is belief in “the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” All three of these uses are saying the same basic thing—salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins are to be found primarily in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.¹⁷ Believing in Jesus’ name carries the idea of believing in the person who bears the name. Forgiveness of sins is provided for the sake of Jesus’ name and person according to 1 John 2:12. The only person who can genuinely forgive sins is God according to the Gospel of John and other passages. Also, 1 John 3:23-24 indicate that belief in Jesus is an act of obedience that leads to an abiding presence of both Jesus and the Spirit of God. Finally 1 John 5:13 equates faith in Jesus’ name with the experience and knowledge of eternal life. The statement “we know that we have passed out of death to life” in 1 John 3:14 expresses a similar thought of confidence and knowledge of salvation. The latter half of that verse states that confidence in this area comes is caused by loving the brothers. This love of the fellowship is part of the commandment that includes faith in Jesus’ name in 3:23. In chapters 3 and 5 John seems to say that faith in the name of Jesus leads to a knowledge of life (in the case of chapter 3, that life is exemplified in how one treats others). In other words, John’s doctrine of salvation is exclusive in that he claims no other means of salvation, eternal life, or the forgiveness of sins beyond the person of Christ and faith in his character and accomplishments. This belief ends not with spiritual transformation alone, however, as the rest of 1 John 5:13 shows. John says here that faith in Jesus leads to knowledge or assurance of eternal life. John’s doctrinal exclusivity leads to “assurance” of salvation.

John address the issue of Christian confidence by use of the verb to know (some version of, οἶδα —“to have seen” or “perceived” and hence “to know, be aware, or understand”) some six times in this conclusion (5:13, 15—twice, 18-20). Westcott notes that the sense here is that those who believe in Jesus’ name will know they have eternal life “with a knowledge final and certain.”¹⁸ Stott adds that John means that Christians “may possess here and now a present certainty of the

¹⁶The references to “faith” and to the “name” of God’s Son are reminiscent of 1 John 3:23 where John states one of God’s commandments is that “we believe in the name of his Son Christ.”

¹⁷Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 302-303; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 291; Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 310; Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 188-189.

¹⁸ Westcott, *The Epistles of John*, 188.

life that they received in Christ.”¹⁹ John seems to say that those who have come to place faith in the person of Jesus Christ have some to an exclusive conclusion and a position of confidence. Relationship with God through Jesus’ Incarnation leads to confident knowledge of salvation.²⁰ On the other hand, this purpose statement also reminds the readers that John writes “not to persuade unbelievers of the truth of Christian faith but rather to strengthen Christian believers who might be tempted to doubt the reality of their Christian experience . . .”²¹ In other words, this purpose statement issues a call to confidence while also acknowledging that this letter was written at least in part to encourage those who may be losing that very confidence. This mention of confidence returns when John focuses on prayer in the next series of verses.

The second section of this passage comprises 1 John 5:14-17 and focuses on the issue of Christian confidence in prayer. Here John notes that assurance in salvation leads to confidence in prayer. For John, the knowledge that one has eternal life (i.e., on-going relationship with God) results in confidence that God will hear your prayers. The presence of the conjunction in 5:14 suggests that John wants to say that, along with assurance of eternal life, believers also experience confidence in their relationship with God and, in particular, confidence in prayer.²² The word “confidence” in 1 John 5:14 is same as 3:21b (i.e., *παρρησία*). This word appears in 2:28 and 4:17 in the context of judgment, implying that the one who abides in Jesus or has his love will not be ashamed at judgment. In 5:14 and 3:21b, however the context is one of prayer. In 5:14, as in the previous three occurrences, the term “confidence” is applied to a believer’s status before God.

The term *παρρησία* denotes a freedom of speech that enables believers to express their hearts and minds before God without hesitancy or fear of embarrassment.²³ In other words, this “confidence” is a type of boldness before God in making requests in prayer. The boldness in the case of this chapter is

¹⁹ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 187.

²⁰ See Bass, *That You May Know*, for more.

²¹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 243; see also Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 189. Kruse adds “(John’s) readers had been disturbed by the denials and claims of the secessionists. These people denied important elements of the message the readers had embraced at the beginning. They also claimed to be recipients of special revelation through the Spirit to which the readers were not privy. The readers’ assurance had been shaken by these denials and claims, and the author’s primary reason for writing the letter was to bolster their assurance by counteracting the false teaching of the secessionists.”

²² Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 189.

²³ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 313; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 380; Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, 189; Lieu, *I, II, III John*, 223.

specifically related to intercessory prayer for others. John tells his readers that the confidence they may have before God results from asking according to God's will. Prayer according to God's will in 5:14 is parallel to "keeping his commandments and doing the things that are pleasing in his sight" in 3:22-23.²⁴ The faithful receive whatever they ask if they pray according to God's will or keep his commandments. Like 1 John 3, the statement in 5:14 indicates that receiving answers to prayer is conditional. Praying according to God's will may also be a reference to the emphasis in John's Gospel of the believer remaining in Jesus and having Jesus' words remain in him, or further the reference may be to Jesus' emphasis to pray in his name in the Gospel (cf. John 15:7, 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:21-24, 26).²⁵ At the very least, John calls the Christian to be like Jesus in Gethsemane and pray for God's will to be done and not the individual's selfish will (cf. Mark 14:36). To pray according to God's will means for the Christian to put the plans and purposes of God before any individual selfish desires or interests. This type of prayer is not a magic wand to get what a person desires, rather it is a bending of the individual's will to submit to the higher plan and purpose of God.²⁶ Confidence in prayer is dependent on knowing the character of God and praying his will. If this goal is pursued, then God's response to prayer is assured. First John 5:15 expands further on this theme.

Returning to the familiar word "know" (from οἶδα, see comments above for more), John assures his readers that God will hear and respond to their prayers. The use of οἶδα (twice in this verse) implies that the Christian can be sure that his or her faith in God's character is not misplaced. The idea is that if one prays according to God's will, then God will hear and respond.²⁷ The use of "if" in these verses does not necessarily imply an uncertainty. The verse is saying that if the believer is in a proper relationship with God, then that believer can count on God's character and expect God both to hear and to respond to requests offered according to God's will.²⁸ First John 3:22 echoes this sentiment with the condition that the believer keeps God's commandments and does what is pleasing to him. In both chapters the sense is that God responds to the faithful and gives what is requested.

²⁴ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 189-190; Painter, *1, 2, 3 John*, 314.

²⁵ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 295; Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 204.

²⁶ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 188; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 245.

²⁷ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 205; Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 315-316.

²⁸ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 205; Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 315-316.

Up to this point, the similar passages in 1 John 3 have simply corroborated or in some sense paralleled the material found in 1 John 5. Things get a bit more complicated in verse 16. Before offering an interpretation of this passage, a short comparison and outline of the relation between 1 John 3:9-24 and 1 John 5:13-21 may be helpful:²⁹

1. 1 John 5:13 compares to 1 John 3:23b and 14a
2. 1 John 5:14-15 corresponds to 1 John 3:14a, 21b-22
3. 1 John 5:18 compares to 1 John 3:9
4. 1 John 5:19 corresponds to 1 John 3:10
5. 1 John 5:20 corresponds to 1 John 3:19a and 24³⁰

Most of these comparisons reveal a similar use of terms or ideas. If these comparisons are accurate, then the most difficult and often discussed portions of chapter 5 may also find correspondence in chapter 3. In that case, 5:16-17 may correspond to 1 John 3:10b-12 and 14b-17. With this possibility in hand, how should 1 John 5:16-17 be read?

Beginning in 1 John 5:16, the author seems to offer an example of praying according to God's will.³¹ Another view is possible, however, and seems to fit the overall purpose of 1 John better. If John's purpose in writing this letter is to combat the false teaching and its effect on the community, and further if he is writing to encourage and strengthen his fellow believers in the church, then possibly the reason for these two verses is more than offering an example of answered prayer. This section then deals with a topic that has been ongoing in this letter: how does a believer relate to sin? John has made a point of acknowledging that those who have placed their faith in the Incarnate Jesus will not continue to practice sin (cf. 1 John 1:6-9; 2:1-2; 3:2-10). This letter reminds its readers that those who make a habit of practicing sin actually belong to the anti-Christ, the world, and the devil (cf. 1 John 3:4-18). He also warns on more than one occasion against the danger of pursuing the things of the world or falling into the habit of sin (cf. 1 John 2:15-17, 22-27). The admonitions to avoid loving the world (2:15-17), or to abide in the truth which was received from the beginning (2:24-25), or to love one another and not to hate the brother (3:14-18; 4:7-12, 19-21), or to love in deed and in truth (3:18), or to do as God commands (3:21-24), or to test the spirits to make sure that they are from God (4:1-3) all at least imply that the author is drawing a contrast and offering a warning against sin. He encourages his readers to make sure that they are

²⁹ For a color coded comparison, see the chart in Appendix A.

³⁰ These last three will be considered later in the paper.

³¹ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 207; Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 190; and Stott, *The Letters of John*, 188.

following the things of God and are not in danger of living in the sphere of the world, the anti-Christ, or the devil. As Marshall states, “Now, as (John) attempts to reassure his readers that they are children of God, the question of their sin once more arises, and he takes it up again arguing that the prayers of believers can secure life for their fellow Christians when they fall into sin.”³² These two verses (5:16-17) are therefore a deliberate attempt to show his readers how to help a brother who sins.

Before investigating these two verses, a brief overview may be helpful. Simply stated, John says that seeing a brother sin a sin “not unto death” should cause a believer to pray for his brother. This prayer to God will result in life for the sinning brother if the sin is “not unto death.” This mention of sin “not unto death” raises the obvious question of sin “unto death.” John offers no direct definition of this type of sin, but he says enigmatically “Concerning that I do not say that one should pray.” He closes these verses with a reminder that all unrighteousness or wrongdoing is sin, but some sin is “not unto death.”

Verse 16 describes a situation in which one believer sees another committing a sin “not unto death.” The idea that the intercessor “sees” this occurring at least implies that the sin being committed is obvious and apparent.³³ The description is of one person seeing a “brother” commit a sin. Who are these “brothers”? John seems to think that the “brothers” are genuine believers (against Stott).³⁴ At least in the case of sin “not unto death,” the interpreter is on solid ground to see the one committing this kind of sin as being a genuine Christian (but more on this later). John’s point here seems to be that there is hope if (the subjunctive here denotes a possible situation and describes what is expected under certain circumstances) a brother lapses into sin. Realistically John accepted the possibility of a genuine Christian sinning (cf. 1 John 1:10; 2:1-2; 4:10).³⁵ The question remains as to what kind of sin is being addressed here as sin “not unto death” or sin “unto death.” In fact, some questions may arise as to whether a genuine believer can commit sin “unto death.” A possible definition of these sins may be helpful in determining the author’s meanings.

³² Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 246; see also Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 297.

³³ Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, New International Biblical Commentary, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993, 135; Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 190; Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 316; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 611; Jerry Townsend, “The Sin Unto Death,” *Restoration Quarterly* 6/3 (January 1962), 147.

³⁴ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 246; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 297; Westcott, *The Epistles of John*, 191; cf. Stott, *The Letters of John*, 192.

³⁵ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 316; Marshall *The Epistles of John*, 246-247; Brown *The Epistles of John*, 611.

The issue of sin “not unto death” and “unto death” has been debated almost since John wrote this letter. Many suggestions have been offered but little consensus has been gained.³⁶ The following candidates represent the definitions offered most readily for sin “unto death.” 1.) Sin “unto death” is a specific sin so serious that God would immediately inflict physical death upon the offender (cf. Numbers 18:22; Deuteronomy 22:25-26; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30). While this view has the merit of several biblical examples, it is untenable with regards to 1 John because it fails to take John’s understanding of “life” and “death” into account. The letter of 1 John uses “life” (some version of ζωή) at least 13 times. Each usage is in reference to “spiritual” life and refers specifically to eternal life or to Jesus as the giver or personification of that life. If the “life” referred to in 1 John 5:16-17 is spiritual life, then the “death” mentioned must be of a similar nature.³⁷ 2.) Sin “unto death” and sin “not unto death” refer to intentional and unintentional sins (or the Jewish traditions of sins with a “high hand” punishable by death). Simply stated, the context of 1 John 5 does not indicate this kind of distinction.³⁸

3.) Sin “unto death” is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (i.e., the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:32 and Mark 3:29). Although John sees sin as deliberate and often describes it as a rejection of the truth as expressed in the Incarnate Christ, there is no good evidence in 1 John that would lead his readers to conclude that he had this sin in mind.³⁹ 4.) Sin “unto death” is apostasy or the deliberate rejection of Jesus Christ. This fourth view seems to create more discussion and disagreement than the others. As Bass points out, one must define whether the apostasy is theological or phenomenological.⁴⁰ “Theological apostasy” refers to the belief that a person is genuinely born of God and has passed from death to life but then walks away from the faith and passes back into death and becomes a child of the devil. “Phenomenological apostasy” refers to the view that “asserts that anyone who joins himself to the church of God, tastes of the heavenly

³⁶ The reader needs to do little but look at the bibliography and peruse these sources to see a multitude of possibilities. The sad reality is that this bibliography does not even begin to represent an exhaustive treatment of the topic!

³⁷ Bass, *That You May Know*, 170; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 297-298; Brown *The Epistles of John*, 614-615.

³⁸ Bass, *That You May Know*, 171; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 614-617; Irvin A. Busenitz, “The Sin Unto Death.” *The Master Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1990), 17-18; Townsend, “The Sin Unto Death,” 148.

³⁹ Bass, *That You May Know*, 171; Stott, *The Letters of John*, 191; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 616-617; Busenitz, “The Sin Unto Death,” 23-24.

⁴⁰ Bass, *That You May Know*, 172.

gift, and then falls away demonstrates that he or she has never genuinely been born of God” or has never experienced true salvation.⁴¹ This last view comes closest to fitting the overall context of John’s letter, but a determination must be made between the two types and which one fits the overall argument of 1 John.

John utilizes a dualistic framework in his argument against the false teachers. He routinely contrasts things like: 1) light and darkness, 2) children of God and children of the devil, 3) those who remained and those who have gone out, 4) love and hate, 5) those who love the brothers and those who hate the brothers, and 6) sin “not unto death” and sin “unto death.” If the phenomenological apostasy argument is accepted, then the true Christian fits the category of the first item in each set, while the second item in each list corresponds to a person who may have claimed to be a believer and really was not. Even the lack of mention of a “brother” in 1 John 5:16b leads some to conclude that the sin described here is not related to a true believer.⁴²

Some supporters for this view argue that 2:18-24 indicate that those who left the Johannine community were not genuine Christians (see verse 19 especially—“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, that it might be manifested that they all were not of us”).⁴³ But is that argument as clear as some would like it to be? Does the whole argument of 1 John support this view? One problem may be found in 1 John 3:14-18. In verse 14 John reminds his readers that assurance of salvation can be found in the reality that “we love the brothers.” He also reminds us that the one who “does not love abides in death.” Verse 15 speaks of someone who is guilty of hating “his brother” while verse 17 speaks also of seeing “his brother” in need. Although these verses can be taken as a warning of sorts, earlier in the same chapter (3:4-13) John distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil.⁴⁴ The children of God do what is right, while the children of the devil “do not do right” and do “not love (the) brothers” (3:10). Presumably John has in mind here that the children of God will love the brothers. Furthermore, John seems to be distinguishing between those “who went out from among us” and those remained in the teaching from the beginning (3:11). The

⁴¹ Bass, *That You May Know*, 172.

⁴² Bass, *That You May Know*, 173-174; Stott, *The Letters of John*, 191-192; Busenitz, “The Sin Unto Death,” 23.

⁴³Bass, *That You May Know*, 164-166.

⁴⁴ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 617-618.

implication seems to be that the false teachers do these things as “brothers” in chapter 3.⁴⁵

Now the value of reading chapter 5 through the lens of chapter 3 can be clearly seen. If there is a correspondence between the two chapters (the only two places where the ideas of “sin,” “death,” “life,” and “prayer” all appear in a similar context), then the possibility exists that the description of sin “unto death” may be found in chapter 3. That description may be found in 3:10b-12 and 14b-17. Sin “unto death” may refer to the act of hating or mistreating brothers. To hate one’s brothers is to be a “murderer” like Cain, and failure to lay down one’s life for the brothers (following the example of Jesus) results in death. Ironically, dying to selfish desires may lead to spiritual death. Verse 17 sums it up, anyone who has the world’s goods and fails to help his brother in need does not have the love of God in him. Without the love of God, that person is dead. The act of failing to help a brother when it one is able to do so would be a fairly public reality. Of course, this hypothesis does not genuinely satisfy the overall context of 1 John or the theological presuppositions of many.

Perhaps defining sin “unto death” in this specific of a manner is simply impossible for us today.⁴⁶ To be sure, 1 John 5:16 speaks of “seeing a brother sinning a sin,” so the context seems to be one of “Christians.”⁴⁷ Those who want to read this as “non-believers” must redefine the meaning of “brother” in John or postulate the possibility of some kind apostasy. The reference to “brother” in this verse makes it clear that John has in mind someone that is a member of the Christian community.⁴⁸ The problem is that John is decidedly unclear regarding the content of the two types of sin mentioned.⁴⁹ Reading the phrase “unto death” as

⁴⁵There is also the weaker evidence of chapter 4. In 1 John 4:1-3, John calls his people to test the spirits of those coming to the congregation. These verses at least imply that the people speaking are seen as brothers, for why else would believers listen to them or need to test the spirits? Verses 20-21 restate the issue of hating “his brother.” The emphasis seems to be on the possessive “his” here. The person in focus is one who hates “his” brother. Again, how can he hate a “brother” if he is not a “brother”?

⁴⁶ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 299. To be honest, the author of 1 John and his audience no doubt understood the distinctions between sins “unto death” and not “unto death.” The problem is that we are not in a position to reclaim those distinctions with absolute clarity. The hypothesis offered here will certainly not solve that problem!

⁴⁷ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 249-250; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 299-300. For the opposing view, see Randall K. J. Tan, “Should We Pray for Straying Brethren? John’s Confidence in 1 John 5:16-17,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45/4 (December 2002), 601-603; Stott, *The Letters of John*, 192.

⁴⁸ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 249-250; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 299-300.

⁴⁹ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 297-300.

denoting a sphere of influence or a direction is one way around this impasse. The use of “death” in John’s letter rarely means physical death (but see 3:12 and Cain’s example) and typically means a spiritual condition (cf. 3:14b says that he who does not love abides in death, probably referring to a spiritual condition and not physical death). If “death” refers to spiritual death, then can it also refer to a negative sphere or influence in a person’s life? If John means that sins “unto death” refer to sins that put the guilty party (and others?) on the path of death or under the influence of death, then a reading including chapter 3 becomes a possibility yet again.

First John 3 reminds the readers that Cain hated his brother and became a murderer. Jesus warns his followers that mistreatment of a brother leads to the condemnation of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). Perhaps John has in mind here the mistreatment of his congregation as the hands of the false teachers who left? These false teachers may have been withholding physical comfort from the church, but they may also have been the cause of “death” in the congregation by dividing the congregation and trying to lead others astray to a false view of Jesus and redemption. They chose a lifestyle of death over the life that comes in John’s congregation through Jesus. That is, they involved themselves in activities that lead to death both for them and potentially for others. Could this possibly be a referent to what is called sin “unto death”? Remember, John offers tests to help his readers discern to which side they belong (e.g., in 4:19-21, John encourages his readers to love God and their brothers and to avoid claiming a love for God while showing hatred for the brothers). John even notes the highest test of loving God is how one responds to the needs of his or her brothers (3:16-18; 4:19-21). This response is a very public act and would no doubt be obvious to the congregation.⁵⁰ A definitive answer cannot be honestly given, but the possibility of some kind of apostasy seems to exist.

In verse 16b of chapter 5, John states mentions sin “leading to death” or sin “unto death,” and concludes with the enigmatic statement that “not concerning that I say that he should pray.” The question arises as to whether or not John is forbidding prayer for those who commit sin “unto death.” John calls for intercession for a brother who sins “not unto death,” acknowledging that such

⁵⁰ As noted by Marshall (*The Epistles of John*, 248-250), Painter (*I, 2, 3 John*, 317-320), and Lieu (*I, II, III John*, 225-22), the sin “unto death” here seems decidedly tied to the false teachers who separated themselves from John’s congregation. That separation was itself a type of “death” in that it caused a rift and led to the false teachers being found in the realm or influence of death. Whether or not these were “true believers” who repudiated Christ (as Hebrews 6:4-8 seems to indicate) or merely “nominal” believers who did not truly commit to Christ, the end result is death for the one who commits this sin.

intercession will result in life for that brother (5:16).⁵¹ In contrast, 16b seems to indicate that Christians should not pray for one who commits sin “unto death.” Is John saying that there is a time for a believer not to pray? A very simple solution to this problem is to answer in the positive, to say that John is telling his readers that they “have no obligation to pray about certain serious sins but can leave in God’s hands those who commit such sins.”⁵² The problem here is that this sentence does not sound like a prohibition.⁵³ John speaks ambiguously here, and that makes an understanding of this sentence difficult.

If sin “unto death” is the sin of the false teachers and involves a separation from John’s congregation (even mistreatment or hatred towards them), and if that separation caused more divisions or resulted in others leaving the congregation, then it seems possible that John would not want his congregation to pray for these people. After all, they had created division where John’s gospel had promoted unity, they hated the brothers and treated their beliefs with disdain, they had even gone so far as to speak lies about the nature of Christ’s Incarnation! Perhaps John feels here a bit like Paul in Galatians 5:12 when he says that he wishes the Judaizers would mutilate themselves (perhaps in a “botched” circumcision). Like Paul, John wants these people to stop bothering his congregation, so he leaves them to their own devices instead of asking his church to pray for them. Of course, that runs counter to John’s admonition to love the brothers, so it does not seem likely that John’s righteous indignation is the driving force here.

What should be said about this sentence then? Possibly the action of separation from the congregation and treating its brothers with hatred is an irrevocable sin. Like Hebrews 6:4-8, there remains no repentance for a sin like that. Again, John offers no clue to support this view. Perhaps the best solution would be to acknowledge that there are certain times in Scripture when God simply does not require prayer. He tells Moses not to intercede for Israel in Exodus 32:10 (cf. Deuteronomy 9:14), and he tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people in 7:16, 11:14, and 14:11. Jesus says that he does not pray on behalf of the world in John

⁵¹ “Life” in this context does not seem to mean “salvation” or “eternal life.” On the issue of the definition of “life” in this verse, see notes and bibliographies in Bass, *That You May Know*, 168-170; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 611-612; Akin *1, 2, 3 John*, 207ff; Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 190-191; and Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 318. Hiebert’s suggestion seems plausible: “In this context the bestowal of life must be understood as a renewal and strengthening of the life already possessed (3:14; 5:11-13), prompting a fuller spiritual life and victory in Christ.” The “life” given then may God’s empowerment to overcome the sin and proceed to victory.

⁵² Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 613, but note that the last part of that sentence is not clearly stated in 1 John 5:16.

⁵³ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 501; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 251; Tan, “Should We Pray,” 603ff.

17:9, so there are precedents for a call to avoid prayer.⁵⁴ Whatever sin “unto death” is, perhaps John continues in the attitude of Jesus and equates this sin with the world. As a result, John recommends that his people not pray for those whose lives exemplify this kind of sin. The tendency is to somehow mitigate the offensiveness of a call to avoid prayer, but that might do harm to the text. The best solution seems to be to acknowledge that sometimes it is part of God’s will for believers not to pray. Discerning when that is true is the hard part. As Marshall suggests, one solution is to pray for all who sin unless there are obvious and godly reasons why prayer is not allowed.⁵⁵ So, John seems to have an idea of some time when prayer is not effective and should not be pursued, and that time would be when sin “unto death” is present. The mention of sin “unto death” brings John to a concluding statement for this section. Verse 17 of chapter 5 acknowledges that all unrighteous is sin, but not all sin leads to death. With that, John moves to a discussion of confidence in Christian living in 1 John 5:18-20.

This new section returns to a discussion of what the Christian “knows” about his relationship to God. Three times some form of *οἶδα* to discuss various aspects of Christian living.⁵⁶ In 1 John 5:18, John reminds his readers of the distinction between children of God and those not born of God (although this latter point is implied rather than stated). As in 1 John 3:9, John speaks of the Christian as being “born of God,” and that spiritual birth results in an avoidance of a continuation or practice of sin. In 5:18, John says that “no one born of God sins,” while 3:9 is a bit more specific in stating that “no one born of God does sin.”⁵⁷ Chapter 5 says that part of the reason for this inability to practice sin lies in the protection of “the one who was born of God” who supposedly keeps the “evil one” from touching the believer (v. 18). 1 John 3:9 says that God’s “seed abides” in the Christian, and that keeps the Christian from sinning. If “God’s seed” in 3:9 refers to Jesus (cf. Galatians 3:16-19), then the one who was born of God in 5:18 may refer to Christ as well. In fact, this reading of 5:18 makes the most sense.⁵⁸ The idea that the believer protects himself from the evil one is not readily apparent in

⁵⁴ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 613-614.

⁵⁵ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 251.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 251; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 619; Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 322; Akin, 1, 2, 3, *John*, 210ff.

⁵⁷Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 322.

⁵⁸ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 322-323; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 252; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 620-622. The switch from a perfect to an aorist tense here strongly suggests a change in meaning. Also, if Jesus is intended (as is likely), then it completes the contrast with the evil one in this same verse.

John's letter, but the sense that Jesus produces life and relationship with God for the believer is obvious. The contrast then is that the one born of God does not practice sin, while the one belonging to the evil one practices sin. John is saying to his readers that they have confidence in their relationship with God as his children because Jesus is the one who not only produces that relationship, but also guards it so that the evil one will not harm it.⁵⁹ This contrast leads to a second comparison.

John's second declaration is a reminder that humanity may be divided into two camps. In 1 John 5:19, John makes this explicit—"we know that out of God we are and the whole world in the evil one lies." As the NASU renders it, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*" (emphasis theirs). This verse speaks to confidence of origin. Those who are in John's camp are true believers and are of God, while those who oppose them and are false teachers are of the evil one and belong to the world.⁶⁰ This contrast is also found in 1 John 3:10, which says "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious." John's point is that there is a clear distinction between those who belong to God and those who do not. The mention of the "whole world" in 5:19 reminds the readers of the only other use of this term in 1 John 2:1-2.⁶¹ In both cases the "whole world" designates those who are outside of God's redemption in Jesus. The believer can have confidence because he is "of God" (5:19) or is a child of God (3:10), while the non-believer is under the influence of the evil one (i.e., the devil). This division of humanity brings John to one final declaration of confidence for believers.

Verse 20 of chapter 5 gives John's readers a statement of confidence regarding Christ's identity and mission. This passage declares that Jesus has come, and that in that coming he has provided for believers an understanding so that we may know the true God and eternal life. The coming of Jesus provides for the believers what is needed for them to leave the grasp of the evil one and the world and to become children of God.⁶² The abiding reality of Jesus' Incarnation is represented by the present tense ἦκει here (although this present has the force of a perfect).⁶³ This reference to an "understanding" (διάνοιαν, used only here in 1

⁵⁹ Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 323; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 252.

⁶⁰ Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 324; Lieu, *I, II, III John*, 231; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 622-623.

⁶¹ Brown *The Epistles of John*, 623; Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 324.

⁶² Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 253; Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 325; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 305-306.

⁶³ Hiebert, "An Expository Study," 324.

John) seems to denote the ability to look beyond the external and to understand reality. The gift of understanding is particularly useful in helping the believer to know the truth about God and eternal life.⁶⁴ The use of this Greek term here may be in response to the somewhat Gnostic beliefs of the false teachers in which they taught a direct revelation of reality or truth without the need for an Incarnate Jesus. Comparing this to 1 John 3:24, the reader will be reminded that the source of all truth and the knowledge of eternal life is Jesus and his Spirit. The “understanding” that is given (the idea of “given” here is a perfect tense indicating an ongoing result of an event that has already occurred) leads believers to the Truth.⁶⁵ This Truth is that Jesus reveals the true God (and is, indeed, the true God), and by that revelation Jesus provides eternal life.⁶⁶ Christians can be confident that what Jesus offers is true and reliable. With this confident note as his closing, John offers a final warning.

“Little children, keep yourself from idols” is the final statement of 1 John. An odd way to end a letter, John seems to be offering one final warning to his readers to avoid falling into the trap of the false teachers and their false beliefs. The reference to “idols” here probably points not to actual stone statues but rather to those teaching of John’s opponents that exalt them to a place where they try to replace Jesus with something that is less than God. John ends his letter with a warning to avoid false teaching, presumably so that his readers will also avoid the possibility of falling into the error and sin of those who had left for a false teaching. Contrast that to 1 John 3:18 where John calls on his “little children” to love one another “not . . . with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” Apparently the false teachers talk a good game of loving others, but their error was revealed in their hatred for John’s congregation and their murderous attitudes toward John’s gospel and “little children.” In contrast to this false speech and activity, John encourages truth in action and words. To put this in the context of idols, John may say that idols seem to promise an easy way to manage a chaotic world, but they are incapable of responding with deeds or truth. In fact, real stone idols cannot respond at all and are false gods. The closing point is that the teaching of John’s opponents is false in what it says and in how it lives. John’s believers should avoid them with due diligence and guard against the trap of false teaching.

⁶⁴ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 325; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 253-254;

⁶⁵ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 325; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 306.

⁶⁶ Hiebert, “An Expository Study,” 326; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 325-326.

CONCLUSION

John's continued emphasis on assurance or confidence pervades this letter. From the first chapter to the final warning against idols, John offers a two-tiered view of the world in which those who follow John's gospel and thus Jesus Christ find themselves walking in assurance and confidence. Assurance or confidence does not come without a challenge, however, and so John also consistently warns his readers of the danger of slipping into the world of a false view or understanding of Jesus. John emphasizes the reality of salvation as coming through only one source—the incarnate Jesus, God in the flesh. This relationship with the incarnate God creates confidence in the life of the believer according to John. The only place this confidence seems shaky is with regards to the area of sin “unto death” in chapter 5:13-21. John's exclusive gospel seems challenged when John recommends that believers avoid praying for others who have committed the “sin unto death.” Of course, the question of whether or not John requests such a thing is unclear, but what is clear is that John sees a world at war, a world divided between those of the light and those of the darkness, those born of God and those born of the devil, those who received life and those who received death. This dichotomy causes John to offer both encouragement and warning to his readers. Striding the fence between the two worlds, John alternates between painting a rosy picture of family security and safety in Christ and a dark view of the world as a hazardous place full of lies, sin, and death. A comparison of 1 John 5 to 1 John 3 revealed that John was concerned that “brothers” could become unloving, calloused, even dead in some sense, and this concern led him to offer tests for his people to use in examining their lives for things that pertained to truth and salvation. The final test offered is that of keeping God's commandments to believe in the name of Jesus and to love the brothers. If these things exist, then the believer is safe in a hazardous world. The solid foundation is the true revelation of Jesus about the true God and eternal life. That alone keeps the believer secure, and John encourages his readers to examine themselves to see if that is evident in them. “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

APPENDIX A
 COLOR SCHEMATIC OF SIMILAR THEMES/WORDS IN
 1 JOHN 3 AND 5

NAU 1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. 16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death. 18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

1 John 3:9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

BNT 1 John 5:13 Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. ¹⁴ Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτόν ὅτι ἐάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. ¹⁵ καὶ ἐὰν οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὃ ἐὰν αἰτώμεθα, οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. ¹⁶ Ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ. ¹⁷ πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, καὶ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον. ¹⁸ Οἴδαμεν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, ἀλλ' ὁ γενηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ αὐτόν καὶ ὁ ποιηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ. ¹⁹ οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ ποιηρῷ κείται. ²⁰ οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει καὶ ἐδῶκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος. ²¹ Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδῶλων.

BNT 1 John 3:9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται. ¹⁰ ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστὶν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου· πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ. ¹¹ Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ¹² οὐ καθὼς Καὶν ἐκ τοῦ ποιηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ποιηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια. ¹³ [Καὶ] μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος. ¹⁴ ἡμεῖς οἴδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς· ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ. ¹⁵ πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἐστίν, καὶ οἴδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν. ¹⁶ ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι. ¹⁷ ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχῃ τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ; ¹⁸ Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ. ¹⁹ [Καὶ] ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμεν, καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν, ²⁰ ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα. ²¹ Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία [ἡμῶν] μὴ καταγινώσκῃ, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν ²² καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν. ²³ Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν ἡμῖν. ²⁴ καὶ ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ· καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν.