

Conclusion, 5:13-21

Overview

We now come to the conclusion of 1 John (Figure 1). As in the gospel, so here he summarizes with a statement of the purpose that has guided him throughout the book. In the gospel, his purpose was:

Jhn 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Here, it is:

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

We are still focused on life that comes through belief, but now John explains how we know that our faith has in fact produced life.

The conclusion is organized around three mental states that John has discussed elsewhere in the book, and concludes with a final exhortation. The three paragraphs of the conclusion recap the three signs.

- 13, belief—reflects sign of belief
- 14-17, boldness/confidence—applied to love of the brethren
- 18-21, knowledge—avoiding sin and idolatry—righteousness

All three of these states—belief, confidence, knowledge—are meant to encourage believers in uncertain times, to assure them of their eternal relation with God.¹

13 Belief and Eternal Life

The first mental state that John reviews is belief, which focuses on the fundamental truth in the sign of belief, that Jesus is the Son of God. This concept (noun, verb, adjective) appears frequently in the book, but unevenly (Figure 2). It appears in the introduction, then is missing throughout the first panel and most of the second, but peaks in the belief section of the third.

5:13 These things have I written unto you that

believe on the name of the Son of God;—John’s gospel also related belief to eternal life. There,

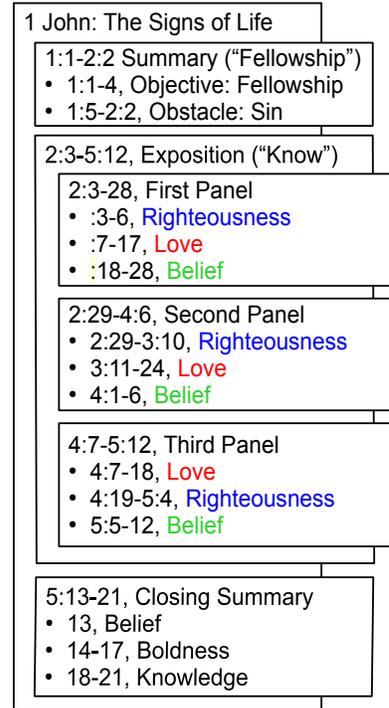


Figure 1: Overall Structure of 1 John

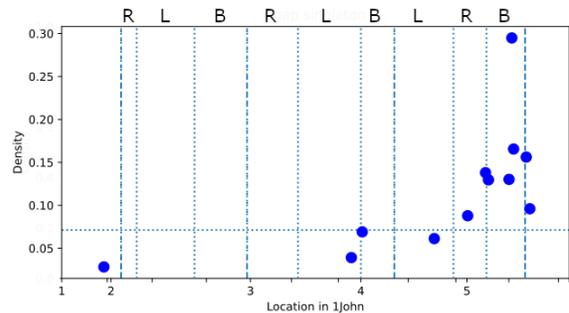


Figure 2: Words for believe, faith, and faithful in 1 John

¹ Law chapter 14 offers a detailed discussion of assurance in 1 John.

he wanted to lead his readers to belief, so that they might have life. Here, he writes to those who already believe.

Note “the Son of God.” John begins his conclusion with how his readers relate to the sign of belief, that Jesus is the Son of God. This sign was the third in each panel (Figure 1), but it is the first in the conclusion.

He distinguishes two purposes for the signs that he has given.

- “that ye may know that ye have eternal life”
- “that ye may believe”

Consider each of these.

that ye may know that ye have eternal life,—As the Spirit begins to work in new believers, the sin that he reveals sometimes discourages them, and leads them to doubt whether they are in fact saved. John addressed this in chapter 1 by discussing the fact of sin in the life of the believer, and outlining the resources God has given to deal with it. The six references to “eternal life” are the pulse of the book, appearing in the opening, the conclusion, and once in each panel.

The opening defines this life as the life with the Father that the Son demonstrated:

1John 1:2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that **eternal life**, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

In the first and third panels, it is associated with the sign of belief, emphasizing that it is something that God has promised and given, rather than being the work of man:

1John 2:25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even (the) **eternal life**.

1John 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us **eternal life**, and this life is in his Son.

In the second panel, it is mentioned negatively in the love section, as something that is inconsistent with hatred of one’s brother:

1John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath **eternal life** abiding in him.

In the conclusion, in addition to 5:13, it appears at the very end:

1John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and **eternal life**.

Here, as in 1:2, we are reminded that eternal life is ultimately a person, the Lord Jesus, and the relation he enjoys with the Father.

So John’s first purpose is that they may know that they have eternal life. The second is at first paradoxical: having assured them that they do believe, he wants them to believe!

and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.—The example of the false teachers is a sober reminder that our faith, in and of itself, is feeble. There are at least two threats that John wants to guard against (chart).

The first is there are many kinds of belief, and not all of them are associated with eternal life. James tells us that there is a species of belief that even the demons share:

Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

The faith that gives eternal life is itself a gift of God:

Jhn 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Recall what we saw in 5:1,

1Jn 5:1 Whosoever believeth [present tense] that Jesus is the Christ is has been [perfect tense] born of God: ...

True faith results from the antecedent work of God's Spirit in giving the new birth.

With this threat in mind, we may understand this verse as saying, "that ye may believe [correctly, truly] ..."

The second threat is related to the first. If one's faith is not produced by the Father, it is liable to disappear. Our Lord, in the parable of the four soils, warned his hearers,

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

John's readers know this threat at first hand, from the departure of the false teachers. With this danger in mind, we may understand the verse as saying, "that ye may [continue to] believe ..."

14-17, Confidence and Prayer

The second mental state is confidence, or boldness (the same Greek word, *παρησία parrēsia* G3954). Like belief and eternal life, confidence appears repeatedly through the book. The first and last instances tell us two settings where we need confidence. The first place we need confidence is at the future return of the Lord:

1John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, **when he shall appear**, we may have **confidence**, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. *belief section*

The the last reference is to our daily dependence on him in prayer:

1John 5:14 And this is the **confidence** that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing** according to his will, he heareth us: *conclusion*

The other two, in the second and third love sections, tell us the source of our confidence. In the second love section, confidence results from loving one another in deed and in truth.

1Jn 3:18 My little children, **let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth**. 19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall **assure our hearts** before him. ... 21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we **confidence** toward God. 22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

In the third love section, it results from dwelling in love:

1Jn 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and **he that dwelleth in love** dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have **boldness** in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

So where the mental state of belief focuses on the sign of belief, the state of confidence or boldness reflects the sign of love. Our love for one another gives us confidence with God.

This section has three paragraphs:

1. 14-15 gives us the basic principle of confidence in prayer.
2. 16a tells us to apply this principle to helping one another in our struggles with sin.
3. 16b-17 clarifies the nature of that sin and our struggle.

14-15, The Confidence of Answered Prayer

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:—As in 3:22, our confidence leads us to cast our cares upon the Lord. And as in 3:22, the success of those prayers depends on pleasing him (“do those things that are pleasing in his sight”).

Again, we hear echoes of the upper room, where our Lord repeatedly encouraged his disciples to bring their requests to the Father (chart):

Jhn 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall **ask in my name**, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Jhn 14:14 If ye shall **ask any thing in my name**, I will do it.

Jhn 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall **ask of the Father in my name**, he may give it you.

Jhn 16:23 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall **ask the Father in my name**, he will give it you.

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

Jhn 16:26 At that day ye shall **ask in my name**: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: 27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Both in the upper room and here, we are encouraged to come boldly to the Lord with our needs. In both cases, there is a condition. But the conditions appear to differ. The epistle tells us to pray “according to his will,” while the Lord in the upper room speaks of praying “in my name.”

Our Lord taught the disciples to shape their prayers to the Father’s will, when he gave them the model prayer,

Mat 6:10 **Thy will be done** in earth, as it is in heaven.

And we have his own example in Gethsemane,

Mat 26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, **thy will be done**.

What does this have to do with praying “in my name”?

To ask for something in the name of another person means that we are asking, not for ourselves, but on behalf of that other person. We have an example of this process, though a very sober one,

in Jezebel’s actions on behalf of Ahab, who lusted for the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. Naboth refused to sell it to him, but Jezebel had another idea.

1Ki 21:7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. 8 So **she wrote letters in Ahab's name**, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. 9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: 10 And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

She discerned Ahab’s desire for Naboth’s vineyard, and made requests on that basis. Her request “in Ahab’s name” was valid because it was “according to his will.” “In his name” emphasizes the *authority* with which she wrote (confirmed by using his seal), while “the phrase “according to his will” indicates the *content* of our prayer. The two conditions complement one another.

Keeping these conditions in mind will strengthen and guide our prayers. Many people move directly from a problem to prayer. To pray “according to his will,” we first consider the problem in the light of his will as he has revealed it to us in Scripture. Have other of God’s people faced a similar problem? How was he pleased to help them? How might he glorify himself through this problem? Prayer “according to his will” changes us. As one student of this verse wrote,

The marvellous [*sic*] and supernatural power of prayer consists, not in bringing God's Will down to us, but in lifting our will up to His.²

15 And if we know οἶδα that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know οἶδα that we have the petitions that we desired of him.—Now John gives a specific example of such believing prayer. Notably, it is for the benefit of our brother. We observed that the two previous promises of confidence (3:18-22; 4:16-17) are both based on our love for our brethren, and now John applies this promise of answered prayer to the need of a brother.

16a, Application of the Promise of Prayer

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask αἰτέω, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.—

The prayer is motivated by our awareness of the sin of our brother. Earlier references to sin are concentrated in the second righteousness section (2:29-3:10), and the introduction (Figure 3, chart). Let’s notice these earlier peaks.

The second peak, in the second righteousness section, emphasizes the inconsistency of sin with being God’s child:

1Jn 2:29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. ...3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 7 Little children,

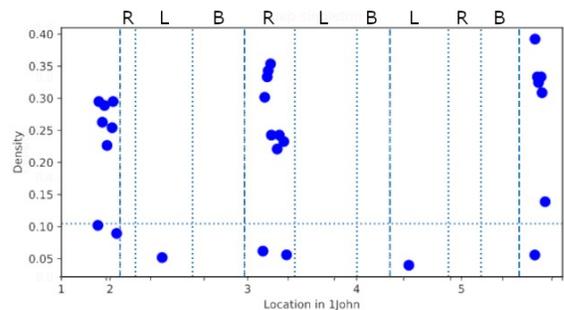


Figure 3: Words for "sin" (*noun ἁμαρτία hamartia G266, verb ἁμαρτάνω hamartanō G264*) in 1 John

2 Law, p. 301

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let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

The logic is impeccable, but the conclusion is humbling, for as the Spirit makes us more and more like the Lord Jesus, we become increasingly aware of how much sin there is in our lives to clean up. Does this mean that we are not in fact the children of God?

John guards against this conclusion in the introduction, the first peak in Figure 3. Three times he forbids denying our ongoing struggle with sin (Table 1): “If we say ... we lie [1:6], we deceive ourselves [1:8], we make him a liar [1:10].” In the first two cases, he tells us how to deal with that sin: “walk in the light” (1:7) and “confess our sins (1:9). In the

Reference	False Claim	Our Duty	God’s Provision
1:6-7	We have fellowship but walk in darkness	Walk in the light	Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us
1:8-9	We have no sin	Confess our sins	God is faithful and just to forgive
1:10-2:2	We have not sinned	?	Jesus Christ is our advocate

Table 1: How to deal with our own sin

third case, we are not aware of our sin, so we cannot act, but God has provided the blood of the Lord Jesus (1:7), his own faithfulness (1:9), and the intercession of our risen Savior (2:2).

So chapter 3 tells us the seriousness of sin. Chapter 1 tells us how to deal with it when we inevitably encounter it. But chapter 1 does not, and cannot, tell us what to do about sin of which we are not aware. We are assured of the advocacy of Christ, but the logic of chapter 3 requires that somehow the sin must go way. The third peak in Figure 3, 5:16-17, fills in the missing box in Table 1. We may be unaware of our sin, but perhaps a brother or sister in the fellowship observes it. It is their responsibility to deal with it.

The instruction is to a single person, “if any man see ... he shall ask.” John does not authorize this observer to ask other people to pray about the sin. Too often we justify harmful gossip under the excuse of sharing a request for prayer for a sinning brother or sister. Nor does he authorize us to start by rebuking the sinner directly. If I see sin in your life, I am to use the boldness I have with God first of all to pray that he would deliver you from that sin.

These two characteristics, prayer rather than rebuke and private vs. public, are qualified in other passages in the NT. Error: Reference source not found summarizes these for our discussion (chart).

The instruction in 5:16 is in the upper left corner: private prayer for the sin that we see in the life of another person.

If their sin is an offense against us personally, Matt 18:15 authorizes us to speak to them directly (upper right). Our Lord emphasizes that this confrontation should be private, though he provides for escalating it by bringing other witnesses, or bringing it before the church. But this entire process is in the case that “thy brother shall trespass against thee,” an offense between one person and another. Matthew 18 does not authorize us to bring private rebuke against someone because of a sin against the Lord that does not directly involve us.

The lower left corner gives an exception to the principle that prayer for the sin of an individual should be private. That is the case in which a believer, struggling with sin and perhaps suffering physical chastisement, confesses his sin to his brethren, who are then to pray together for him.

	Prayer	Rebuke
Private	1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.	Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee , go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
Public	Jas 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.	Ezk 3:17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. 1Co 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. Tit 2:15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. 2Ti 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 1Ti 5:19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

Table 2: Dealing with a Brother's Sin

The lower right corner reminds us that recognized spiritual leaders (OT prophets; church leaders) must sometimes deal publicly with offenses. In each case, the rebuker is recognized as a divinely-appointed leader. Too often, zealous believers who run around inspecting one another's fruit lead to strife in the assembly. John teaches that when we are aware of sin in the life of a brother, we are to make it a matter of prayer. God the Spirit is the one charged with writing God's law in our hearts. He is able to lead our brothers and sisters out of ungodly behavior.

16b-17, Two Kinds of Sin

1 John 5:16 promises that God will give life to the sinner, in response to the brother's prayer. In James, the focus was on physical sickness as the consequence to be removed.³ Is 1 John repeating that same promise?

John concentrates the words "life" and its opposite "death" in the epistle (Figure 4, chart), like "sin," in the introduction and the conclusion, with an intermediate peak, in the love section of the second panel. Life throughout the epistle refers to eternal life, a condition of abiding in God and having him abide in us. Sin disrupts that abiding, and the only two instances of "death" outside of the conclusion refer to this disruption:

1Jn 3:14 We know that we have passed from **death** unto **life**, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in **death**.

³ So in 1 Cor 11:29-31, failure of the church to help one another deal with sin leads to illness and death.

This broader context encourages us to understand “life” and “death” in 1 John 5:16 as spiritual, not physical as in James. The sign of righteousness teaches us to take our lapses into sin very seriously. Persistent sin may be an indication that our belief is defective, that we do not indeed “have the Son” (5:12). When we are aware of sin in our lives, we should zealously pursue the steps outlined in the introduction. And when we are aware of sin in the lives of our brothers and sisters, we should pray that God would deliver them, proving that they are indeed his children.

John qualifies this promise by restricting it to sin that is “not unto death,” and recognizes that there is a “sin unto death.” Our survey of “life” and “death” in 1 John shows that the reference here must be to spiritual death, a sin that refuses not only God’s authority, but also his salvation. In the context of 1 John, we naturally think of the false teachers, who deny that Jesus is the Christ. As we have seen repeatedly, their defective view of our Lord directly rejects the effectiveness of his death as the fulfillment of God’s promise in Exod 34:7, where Jehovah himself promises to bear our iniquity, and transgression, and sin. Our Lord himself recognized such an ultimate sin, when the Pharisees attributed his miracles, evidence that he was the Messiah, to the devil:

Mat 12:22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

If someone thus rejects, deliberately, the very source of salvation, their prospect is dire:

Mat 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, in the gospel context, is attributing the signs by which he authenticated our Lord’s message, to Satan. Such a person, like the false teachers in Ephesus, has deliberately shut his heart to the message of salvation.

There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray ἐρωτά⁴ for it.—John does not promise that our prayer for an apostate will be answered. But encouragingly, he does not forbid such prayer. Note his words carefully. He says, “There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.” He does not say, “I say that he shall not pray for it.” Those of us with apostate loved ones naturally plead with the Lord to grant them repentance, but we do not enjoy the promise given of effective restoration for those who have not rejected the fountain of life.⁵

17 All unrighteousness ἀδικία is sin ἁμαρτία: and there is a sin not unto death.—In concluding his discussion of the sinning brother, John makes two statements about sin. Both of them deal with the third error in chapter 1, the claim that “we have not sinned.” Some people were claiming that a true believer’s life is free from sin. We can best understand John’s statements here if we articulate the claims he is seeking to correct.

“All unrighteousness is sin.” Those who claim sinless perfection will try to justify some offensive behaviors as not being sinful. “Unrighteousness” (ἀδικία *adikia* G93) is “an act that violates the standards of right conduct” (BDAG), “the comprehensive term for wrong, or

4 See Trench and Bengel on distinction between the two verbs for requesting in this verse, αἰτέω and ἐρωτάω.

5 Note Law’s caveat (135f): “It ought to be observed, however, that the introduction of this [the sin unto death] is merely incidental, and that the main subject of the passage is “sin not unto death”; while its actual purpose is to use this as an example of those things regarding which we may pray with perfect confidence of success (5:15).”

wrongdoing, as between persons” (Vine). The conduct of one who claims to be sinless can be very offensive to those around them, but if challenged, they will respond, “Well, that doesn’t count as sin.” The notion of a “white lie,” an untrue statement that really is OK, fits in with this view. John insists that anything that violates right conduct is sinful.

This verse builds on a previous one in the second righteousness section,

1John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin ἁμαρτία transgresseth also the law ἀνομία: for sin is the transgression of the law.

There, someone is claiming that even sin is not a problem as long as it doesn’t violate an explicit law of God. John rejects any such casuistry,

- All unrighteousness, any form of wrong conduct, is sin (5:17).
- All sin violates the law (3:4).

Matthew records some examples of how people are tempted to play word games to evade the clear implications of God’s word. Two common strategies are man-made exemptions, and ranking sins (chart).

The Lord calls out the evasive maneuver of man-made exemptions (traditions) in Matthew 15.

Mat 15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; 6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Jewish tradition allowed a person to dedicate his property to God. He did not actually have to transfer his property to the temple at the time of the vow, but the vow made it inaccessible to others—in this case, his parents.

Another tactic is ranking commandments to distinguish greater ones from lesser ones. Roman Catholic theology, for example, distinguishes mortal sins (which deprive the offender of salvation) from venial ones (which only entail temporal punishment). Such distinctions appear to be in the mind of the lawyer who questioned our Lord:

Mat 22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

These two statements, from Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, make any conduct that does not put God and our neighbor ahead of ourselves, a violation of God’s law. We cannot claim sinlessness by excusing minor offenses. All have sinned, and all continue to sin, while we are in the flesh.

Word games like these show a deep disrespect for the Word of God. When we are tempted to engage in them in our discussions with one another, we should pause and ask ourselves how we would feel if we tried to explain our excuses to God. For he is the judge that we must satisfy.

The ubiquity of sin threatens the confidence of the believer, for we know God’s verdict,

Ezek 18:20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die

Rom 6:23 The wages of sin is death

So John offers a final encouragement to those who are willing to face the fact of sin in the believer’s life: “There is a sin not unto death.” 5:16 recognized, “There is a sin unto death,” sin that involves rejecting the very means of salvation and thus excludes someone from eternal life. But not all sin is of this category. John has been insisting ever since the introduction that if believers claims they have no sin, they are lying. Those who have eternal life still struggle with sin. If they are aware of the sin, they need to confess it and receive the Lord’s cleansing. When they do this, God forgives not only their sin, but the underlying unrighteousness as well:

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins ἁμαρτία, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness ἀδικία.

And if they are unaware of their sin, their brethren need to uphold them in prayer.

This teaching on the nature of sin in the life of the believer, and how we can uphold one another in this constant battle, leads to John’s final paragraph, and back to the sign of righteousness.

18-21, Knowledge and Godliness

The final paragraph supports 5:13, stating three ways that we know our relation to God (18, 19, 20-21) (Table 3, chart). The verb here is οἶδα (*oida* G1492, 15x in 1 John), to know by reflection or instruction, vs. γινώσκω (*ginōskō* G1097, 25x), to know by observation and experience. These three statements are accessible only by revelation, not by direct human perception. This repeated verb clearly marks three sections in the conclusion.

This clear parallelism offers a good exercise in studying biblical structure.

	The believer	The Lord	The World
We know <i>oida</i> ... : Generic Statement of <i>Origin</i>			
18	Whosoever is born of God	Sinneth not
	... him(self)	He that is begotten of God keepeth ...	that wicked one toucheth him not
We know <i>oida</i> ... : Personal <i>Condition</i> as a result			
19	We are of God	The whole world lieth in wickedness the wicked one
We know <i>oida</i> ... : Practical <i>Application</i> (Imperative)			
20-21		The Son of God is come	21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols
	... us	... and hath given ... an understanding	
	We know <i>ginōskō</i> him that is true	
	We are in him that is true,	
		... even in his Son Jesus Christ	
	This is the true God, and eternal life		

Table 3: The parallel structure of 5:18-21

When you find parallel sections, you should try to discern two things:

1. How are the sections similar? What do they have in common? Is the repetition of “we know” the only parallel, or are there others?
2. How are the sections different? What do they add to each other? What distinctive contribution does each one make to the writer’s overall point?

First, how are these sections similar? We have already noted that each one begins with “we know (*oída*). In addition, each statement describes the relation among three characters: the believer, the Lord, and wickedness in the world. Here is the core of the sign of righteousness: our union with the Lord and our separation from the world. At first, 5:21 appears to be unrelated to what goes before, but this observation helps us discern its in the passage, as the only reference to Satan’s realm in the third “we know.”

Second, how are these sections distinct? Each one has a distinct focus.

18 is a **generic statement** of the sign of righteousness: believers in general (whosoever) are characterized, not by sin, but by victory over the world. The emphasis is on their origin (*γεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ* “begotten of God”).

19 applies this general principle to the apostles (“we”) and those who associate with them. Again we read that “we are of God.” But now a new preposition appears: those who are not “of God” are “in,” not just “of,” the wicked one.

20-21 shifts the focus from our origin (“we are of God”) to our position (“we are in him”), reemphasizes the main doctrinal point of the epistle, and focuses on the nature of the God who has begotten us and in whom we live. It concludes with the only imperative in this final section, an exhortation to shun idols.

18, Generic Statement

Each part of the conclusion focuses on one of the three signs of eternal life. 5:13 reminded us of the sign of belief that Jesus is the Son of God. 5:14-17, confidence in prayer, urged us to exercise the sign of love for one another, in praying for wandering brethren. This final section deals with the sign of righteousness: eternal life produces righteous lives. The first statement “we know” summarizes the sign of righteousness, in two parallel statements, describing our attitude toward sin, and the protection God gives us from the wicked one.

18a, Attitude toward Sin

18 We know οἶδα that whosoever is born [pf ptc] of God sinneth not;—This verse is a close parallel of 5:4, in the third belief section. There, John asserted in very general terms that God is more powerful than the world (chart):

1Jn 5:4 For **whatsoever** is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Now he focuses from “whatsoever” to “whosoever.” V. 19 will further particularize it to “we.”

sinneth not;—Some have understood this to mean that a true believer never sins. But John has made clear that this is not his meaning. In 1:5-2:2, and again in 5:16, he recognizes that believers (including himself, “we” in ch. 1) can sin, and gives instructions for overcoming the problem.

This verse, along with some earlier ones, has caused confusion. Recall:

1Jn 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. ... 8 He that committeth sin is of the devil ... 9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

These verses would be very straightforward, if it were not for other passages that clearly teach that believers do sometimes sin:

1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

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

The commentaries discuss a wide range of attempts to resolve this tension. My own approach is based on an observation from the ten commandments. Our English translations make them sound almost like imperatives:

Exo 20:13 Thou shalt not kill. 14 Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15 Thou shalt not steal. 16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

We usually understand “Thou shalt not ...” as equivalent to “Do not ...” But Hebrew has a distinctive word that indicates a prohibition,⁶ and it does not use it here. The verbs are simple future tense statements. “You will not kill. You will not commit adultery. You will not steal. ...” In themselves, these statements are not true. Israelites did kill, did steal, did commit adultery, and so forth. But they set forth God’s standards and expectations.

When I was a child, my mother would sometimes say to me, “We don’t behave that way in our house.” Typically, she would say this after I had just behaved that way! She was not stating an empirical fact, but setting forth the standards I was expected to satisfy.

This is how we can understand these statements about sinlessness in 1 John. John is telling his little children, “We don’t sin. That is not consistent with our position as children of God, and not acceptable to him.” At the same time, he compassionately makes provision for them to deal with sin when they stumble into it.

18b, Protection from the Wicked One

The second of these two parallel statements explains our protection from the forces of evil.

but he that is begotten [aor ptc] of God keepeth himself,—At first glance, this clause appears to describe the believer as protecting himself from Satan.⁷ But there are two problems with this understanding.

The first problem is that whenever John makes the believer the subject of this particular verb “keepeth” (τηρέω *tēreō* G5083), it’s always in the sense of keeping God’s words or commandments, e.g. (chart),

1John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we **keep *tēreō*** his commandments.

6 *לֹא* *al*, H408

7 See notes for more data.

John 14:15 If ye love me, **keep** *tēreō* my commandments.

Elsewhere in John's writings, the one who "keeps" believers from sin (*tēreō*) is a divine figure:

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, **keep** through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

John 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I **kept** them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept φυλάσσω, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that **thou shouldest keep** them from the evil.

Rev. 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, **I also will keep** thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

When John speaks of believers keeping themselves from sin, he uses a different verb, φυλάσσω *fulassō* G5442, "guard":

1John 5:21 Little children, **keep** *fulassō* yourselves from idols. Amen.

John 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall **keep** *fulassō* it unto life eternal.

The second problem with understanding this clause to talk about a believer's keeping himself is the description of the one doing the keeping as "he that is begotten of God" (chart). The verb γεννάω *gennaō* G1080 often describes believers in 1 John (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18a), most recently in the first clause of this verse, "Whosoever is born of God." Whenever the verb refers to a believer, it is in the perfect tense, describing an action in the past with present consequences.

The verb tense here is the aorist participle. The aorist by itself can indicate past action, but the aorist participle "represents the action expressed by the verb as a simple event or fact, without reference either to its progress or to the existence of its result."⁸ John is not saying that the keeper was at some point in the past born of God. He is saying that this individual stands in relation to God as one who is, as a matter of fact, born of him. This characterization corresponds perfectly with the central doctrinal emphasis of 1 John, that Jesus is the Son of God.

This verb form, and the verb *tēreō*, strongly suggest that the one doing the keeping is the Lord Jesus. This also emphasizes the divine role, as in the other clauses in this section (Table 3).

These two observations encourage us to understand the verse as saying that the Lord Jesus is keeping the believer. The problem with this conclusion is the final pronoun, "himself." In fact, a few manuscripts read the simple "him" rather than "himself," a solution followed by the ESV, NET, RSV, and NIV. But the reflexive pronoun is both the clear majority reading and also extremely old.⁹

The solution lies in the extremely close union that 1 John emphasizes between us and the Lord Jesus. Our eternal life consists in fellowship with the Father and his Son (1:1-4; John 17:3). We

8 Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, IA3. *Adverbial* aorist participles can carry temporal information, but the usage here is *adjectival*. See note for further discussion.

9 Sinaiticus and a fifth century corrector to Alexandrinus

are repeatedly told to abide in Christ and in God. 5:20 will remind us that we are not just “**of** God,” but “we are **in** him that is true [the Father], even **in** his Son Jesus Christ.” By the time John writes, Paul has already articulated the concept of the church as the body of Christ:

1Co 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are **we all baptized into one body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. ... 27 Now **ye are the body of Christ**, and members in particular.

Eph 1:22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to **the church, 23 Which is his body**, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Col 1:18 And he is the head of **the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

John does not use this language, but he would be recognizing the same truth to say that the Lord Jesus, in protecting us from sin, is keeping himself, including those who are abiding in him.

and that wicked one toucheth him not.—This verb occurs 39 times in the NT, but this is the only time it refers to harming someone. John may be recalling God’s protection of Abraham and Sarah in the land of the Philistines, as recalled by the Psalmist,¹⁰ using the same verb,

Psa 105:14 He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; 15 Saying, Touch not mine anointed [ones], and do my prophets no harm.

Remarkably, the Psalm describes those thus protected as God’s “messiahs,” aligning with John’s idea that in protecting his people, our Messiah is protecting himself.

We have a picture of this security in the history of David, after he was anointed but before he took the throne. Saul sought to kill him and as David fled, he stopped at the tabernacle at Nob, and Ahimelech the high priest gave food and the sword of Goliath (1 Samuel 21). Doeg told Saul what Ahimelech had done, and Saul not only slew Ahimelech and 84 other priests, but destroyed the city of Nob (1 Sam 22:18-19). The gruesome story continues,

1Sa 22:20 And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. 21 And Abiathar shewed David that Saul had slain the LORD’S priests. 22 And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father’s house. 23 Abide thou with me, fear not: **for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.**

David was the anointed king, but in exile, and Saul sought to destroy him and those who supported David, but David protected Abiathar, who came to abide with him. So in our time, the Lord Jesus is the true king, but in exile, and Satan seeks to destroy him and his supporters, but the Lord Jesus protects those who abide in him.

David does not promise Abiathar comfort, or an elegant court. David is in exile, and Abiathar shares that exile with him. But he is under David’s protection. Similarly, our Lord is in exile from this world, as the Father waits for “the iniquity of the Amorites to be full” (cf. Gen 15:16). He promises us tribulation in this world (John 16:33), but protection from the wicked one.

¹⁰ 1 Chr 16:7ff shows that this Psalm dates to the time of David, but it bears no author’s name.

19, Personal Origin

19 And we know οἶδα that we are of God ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ,—Now John moves from the generic statement to a personal one, from “whoever” to “we” (chart). As in the previous verse, he focuses on our origin. We are of God, having been begotten by him.

1John 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

and the whole world lieth in wickedness.—Better, “the wicked one,” the adversary whom John consistently has in view:¹¹

1 John 2:13 ... I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome **the wicked one**. ...

14 ... I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome **the wicked one**.

1 John 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the **devil**; for the **devil** sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the **devil**. ... 10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the **devil**: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. ... 12 Not as Cain, who was of **that wicked one**, and slew his brother.

1John 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and **that wicked one** toucheth him not.

1Jn 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than **he that is in the world**.

“Lieth” contrasts with “toucheth” v. 18 (Law). He cannot touch us, but he controls the lost.

Luk 4:6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for **that is delivered unto me**; and to whomsoever I will I give it.

Col 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the **power of darkness**, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

John shifts from our *origin* (with the pronoun “of”) to our *position* (with the pronoun “in”). As in v. 18, we are *of* God, born *of* him. But the world is *in* intimate union with the wicked one. They are also “of” the wicked one: 3:12; John 8:44 “Ye are of your father the devil.” Both relations exist not only between unbelievers and the wicked one, but between us and our God. 1 Cor 1:30 summarizes: “**of** him are ye **in** Christ Jesus” (note).

20-21, Practical Application

20 And we know οἶδα—The third fact concerning righteousness is how we apply it in our lives. This paragraph contains the only imperative in 18-21 (21 “keep yourselves from idols”). It tells us, not just what we are (of God, in God), but what we do (we have an understanding and we know him). This verse is a meditation on John 17, primarily vv. 1-4 (Table 4, chart).

11 Of the six instances of the adjective πονηρός *ponēros* G4190 in 1 John, the only one that refers to the abstract condition “wickedness” is the second instance in 3:12, “His deeds were evil,” where the form is unambiguously neuter. The masculine instances all describe Satan, and all are articular (unlike 3:12). The Gospel follows the same pattern: the only articular instance, 17:15, likely refers to “the evil one.” Other writers differ in their usage; in the light of James 4:7, ὁ πονηρός in Matt 5:39 should probably be rendered “evil,” not “the evil one.”

John 17	1 John 5:20
1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son , that thy Son also may glorify thee:	a) And we know that the Son of God is come, f) even in his Son Jesus Christ.
2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal ,	h) and eternal life .
that they might know thee	c) that we may know him
the only true God ,	d) that is true , g) This is the true God ,
and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent .	a) And we know that the Son of God is come ,
4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.	b) and hath given us an understanding ,
21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.	e) and we are in him that is true , f) even in his Son Jesus Christ

Table 4: Parallels between 1 John 5:20 and John 17:1-4, 21

that the Son of God is come,—The verse begins and ends with a reference to our Lord as the Son of God. This is the book’s central doctrinal point. It is also where John 17 begins:

John 17:1 Father, the hour is come; glorify **thy Son**, that **thy Son** also may glorify thee;

The epistle asserts that this Son “is come” into the world, as John 17:3 also insists,

John 17:3 ... Jesus Christ, **whom thou hast sent**.

John’s gospel begins with testimonies to Jesus as the Son of God. John the baptist reports,

Jhn 1:34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

And Nathanael declares, when he meets the Lord,

Jhn 1:49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

The next clause tells us why he has come: to enable us to know something.

and hath given us an understanding,—In his prayer, our Savior acknowledges this mission:

John 17:4 I have **glorified thee on the earth**:

To glorify something is the opposite of hiding it. Solomon wrote,

Pro 28:12 When righteous men do rejoice, there is great **glory**: but when the wicked rise, a man is **hidden**.

When righteousness is in the ascendancy, “there is great glory”; people celebrate openly. But when the wicked gain power, everyone hides.

The Son of God came to glorify his Father, to reveal him to the world. John announces this purpose of the incarnation at the start of the gospel:

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

He discloses God to men. That's one reason John calls him "the Word" (John 1:1).

5:20 goes on to define more precisely the object of this disclosure:

that we may know (γινώσκω *ginōskō* G1097) him that is true,— This second instance of "know" is a different Greek verb from the thrice-repeated "we know." That verb means to know by reflection or by being taught. This one means to know by experience.

This clause takes us directly to John 17:3, a verse that we have often noted:

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

Both texts emphasize two aspects of this experiential knowledge.

First, it is experiencing what God is like. In the upper room, when Philip asked the Lord to show them the Father, the Lord replied,

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

The prophets told people what God is like. But only the Lord Jesus, God's own Son, could demonstrate to them, tangibly, the nature of God.

The second feature of both texts is an emphasis that God is true (chart). "True" in these verses (ἀληθινός *alēthinos* G228) means genuine as opposed to counterfeit, not truthful as opposed to lying (which would be ἀληθής *alēthēs* G227). God is indeed truthful *alēthēs*:

Rom 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be **true**, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

But John's point here, like our Lord's in John 17:3, is that our heavenly Father is the genuine God, compared with the other things the people worship. The point is so important that he returns to it at the end of the verse, "this is the true God."

Paul tells us the significance of recognizing God as the true God:

1 Thes 1:9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and **true God**;

When we know the genuine God, we can avoid being led astray after false gods. The emphasis on this title thus prepares us for John's final exhortation, "Keep yourselves from idols" (5:21).

and we are in him that is true,—This is the counterpart of 5:19, "the whole world lieth in the wicked one." John has written earlier of our being in the Father:

1 John 2:24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue [μένω "abide"] **in the Son, and in the Father.**

1Jn 4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and **he in God.** 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love **dwelleth in God**, and God in him.

The Lord Jesus made clear in the upper room that we could abide in the Son (John 15). Later in John 17, the Lord suggests that our abiding is not just in him, but in him and in the Father:

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, **that they also may be one in us:** that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

The epistle recognizes this joint abiding by adding,

even in his Son Jesus Christ.—We are not just in the Son, and not just in the Father. We abide in the Father and in the Son, sharing in the life that they live together.

This relation of being in God is the basis of the claim of v. 18, “He that is begotten of God” (the Lord Jesus) “keepeth himself.” We are in him and in the Father, secure from all attacks of the wicked one.

This [masculine singular] is the true *alēthinos* God,—The pronoun here is masculine singular. The masculine gender shows that it refers to a person, not just a concept. John is identifying someone, not something, as the genuine God. But who is the antecedent of “this”?

Commentators go back and forth. Some see the reference to “his Son Jesus Christ,” the nearest antecedent. Some, recalling that “him that is true” is the one of whom Jesus Christ is the Son, insist it must be the Father. Some scholars have even changed their opinion over time.¹²

But perhaps the distinction is unnecessary. Recall our Lord’s words to the Jews,

Jhn 10:30 I and my Father are one.

It is likely that John here refers to the Father and the Son together as the one genuine God. And the following phrase confirms this:

and eternal life.—Once again, we are drawn to John 17:3

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

Note how our Lord, in his prayer, defines eternal life as knowing “thee and Jesus Christ,” not just one or the other. Together, they are the object of our knowledge, and this experiential knowledge is eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.—Each of the three “we know” sections has a reference to our spiritual adversary.

- 5:18 warns us of “that wicked one,” the devil.
- 5:19 again mentions “the wicked one.”
- Now he warns of the form in which the wicked one seeks to deceive us, idols.

How is this connected with the epistle as a whole? Physical idols were a problem in the world in which John’s readers lived, as we saw in the Revelation. But he has not said anything about this problem so far in the letter, and it would be surprising to raise and then drop it at this point.¹³

In 5:20, though, he has emphasized the importance of the true (i.e., genuine) God, the unified Father and Son. The word “true” is particularly common in the Revelation, with its warnings against idolatry. Here, John is warming up for that exhortation.

12 Zerwick, cited by Harris, *Jesus as God*, p. 253 note 40.

13 See notes for another possible reference.

We saw that the pronoun “this” refers to the union of the Father and the Son. The book is motivated by the emergence, and later departure, of false teachers, presenting a defective view of the Lord Jesus. In their case, they urged that the man Jesus was distinct from the divine Christ, the Son of God, the one to whom our worship was really due. John’s warning against idolatry may be a final plea not to worship a defective view of our Savior. In John’s day, such a view was the denial of the dual nature of the Lord Jesus as both God and man. This is idolatry, just as much as worshipping a physical item believing that it is God. John would have our love focused on our great God, in his mysterious integration of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Review of 1 John

This brings us to the end of our study of 1 John. Let’s review the book’s purpose, the three signs that support that purpose, and the practical guidance it gives us when we stumble.

Purpose of the Book

As in the Gospel, John tells us the purpose for his book. The purpose of the gospel was to lead us to faith, and thus to eternal life (chart):

Jhn 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 But these are written, **that ye might believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

1 John is written to those who have already believed, to enable them to know that they do indeed have eternal life:

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

To John, “eternal life” is not just insurance against the lake of fire. He begins by describing it:

1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and **shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;**) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and **truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

Eternal life is participating in the eternal life of the godhead. As John writes in his gospel,

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

The verb “know” represents different Greek verbs in John 17:3 and 1 John 5:13 (chart). In 1 John 5:13, it is οἶδα (*oida* G1492), meaning “to perceive.” This awareness can result from teaching: we know *oida* the distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit. John 17:3 uses a different verb: γινώσκω (*ginōskō* G1097), to know by experience, e.g., to know a person in a relationship. John wants his readers to *perceive* that they are in a *relationship* with the Father and his Son.

The significance of this distinction comes out throughout the epistle, when John spells out different evidences of our eternal life. Once, he uses *oida* for this knowledge:

1Jn 3:14 **We know that we have passed from death unto life**, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

He has just expounded the contrasting examples of Cain and our Lord, and on this basis he expects them to perceive the fact that love shows life. And in the conclusion, he repeats this verb he repeats three times to reinforce 5:13:

1Jn 5:18 **We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not**; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 19 And **we know that we are of God**, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 20 And **we know** that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and **we are in him that is true**, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

More often, the verb he uses is *ginōskō*, to come to know by experience:

1Jn 2:3 And hereby **we do know that we know him**, if we keep his commandments.

1Jn 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: **hereby know we that we are in him**.

1Jn 3:19 And hereby **we know that we are of the truth**, and shall assure our hearts before him.

1Jn 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby **we know that he abideth in us**, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

1Jn 4:13 Hereby **know we that we dwell in him**, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

In spelling out the signs, he emphasizes, not the final perception, but the process by which that perception is reinforced. At first we know it—*oida*—because we are taught it. But over time, we “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18), and John’s use of *ginōskō* emphasizes that these are signs of a process, not tests of a finished state.

Three Signs

To accomplish this purpose, John repeatedly describes three signs that indicate eternal life. Each of these is associated with a particular member of the godhead (chart).

1. Righteous lives, the family similarity of those who are born of the righteous Father.
2. Love for one another, reflecting the love that our Savior showed in redeeming us.
3. Doctrinal correctness, as the Spirit shows us that the man Jesus is the divine Son of God.

We traced the development of these signs through three cycles (Table 5). The first panel emphasized the sign of belief (doctrinal correctness), the second the sign of righteousness, and the third the sign of love, which dominates all three cycles (Figure 5).

The sign of righteousness starts with keeping God’s commandments, moves on to being born of a righteous father, and culminates in our reciprocal love to God (Table 6). The role of God begins as lawgiver, then expands to Father, and

	Righteousness	Love	Belief
2:3-28	2:3-6	2:7-17	2:18-28
2:29-4:6	2:29-3:10	3:11-24	4:1-6
4:7-5:12	4:19-5:4	4:7-18	5:5-12
Focus	Father	Son	Spirit

Table 5: The three signs of eternal life

finally is the object of our love. The focus of this sign is on God as our lawgiver, our Father, and the object of our love.

1Jn 2:29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

The sign of belief that Jesus is the Christ (chart) begins with our anointing with the Spirit, moves to his teaching and the deception of false spirits, and concludes with God’s witness to us and our response in belief (Table 7). The Spirit is most in focus here, and he is mentioned almost exclusively in the belief sections (Figure 6).

The evidence for belief involves the assembly, and progresses through the panels. The first panel deals with the false teachers who have left the assembly, and the evidence is continuing to abide in the assembly. In the second panel, the evidence is “hearing us,” that is, the apostles. In the third, the evidence is the testimony that God has provided. In the present day, this testimony is first

the Spirit, which dwells within the believers, but John also reminds them of their corporate memorials of the Lord in baptism and the Lord’s table. The sign concerns what we believe about the Lord Jesus, the one who produces it in us is the Spirit.

The sign of love receives the most emphasis in the book. As the Father’s righteousness motivates ours, and as the Spirit teaches us the truth about the Lord Jesus, our Savior in his sacrifice motivates this sign (chart):

1Jn 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because **he laid down his life for us**: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

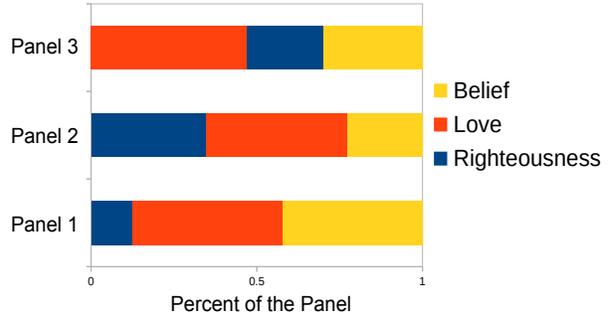


Figure 5: Order and Emphasis of the Signs in Each Panel

	2:3-6	2:29-3:10	4:19-5:4
Vocabulary	Keep, Commandments	Child, Begotten	+ Love God
God’s role	Lawgiver	Father	The Object of our Love

Table 6: The Sign of Righteousness in the Three Panels

	2:18-28	4:1-6	5:5-12
Vocabulary	Anointing, Abide Christ, Son (of God)	Spirit(s) Son (of God)	+Witness, Belief
Key Doctrine	Jesus = Christ; Father and Son	Jesus Christ is come in the flesh	Jesus is the Son of God
Evidence	19 Abiding (in Christ, and in the assembly)	6 Hearing those who are of God (the apostles)	7-8 Testimony of the Spirit, baptism, and the Lord’s Table

Table 7: The Sign of Belief in the Three Panels

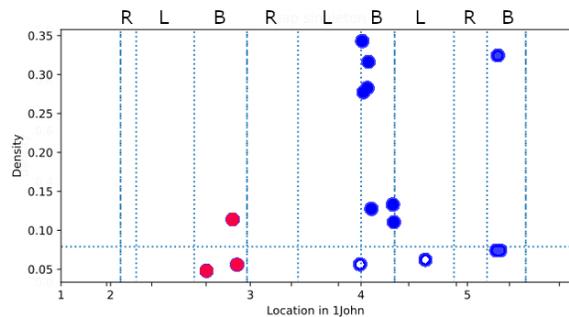


Figure 6: Spirit (blue) and anointing (red) in 1 John, concentrated in belief sections

1John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and **sent his Son** to be the propitiation for our sins.

Table 8 compares how this sign is presented in each panel.

	2:7-17	3:11-24	4:7-18
Motive	Obey the Commandment : walk in the light	Follow the Example	Reflect the Source : God is love
Contrast	Love brother vs. love the world	Cain vs. Christ	Born of God vs. Mutual Abiding
Assurance	Recognize victories: Sins forgiven, Satan overcome, Fellowship with Christ	God is greater than our heart	We are not of the world, so we are exempt from the last judgment

Table 8: The Sign of Love in the Three Panels

Compare the *motive* in each panel for loving one another. In the first panel, John draws their attention to the **commandment** both old and new (using the word four times in the first two verses). The second panel highlights the **example** of Christ, not that of Cain. In the third panel, the motivation is the **source** of our love in the character of God, who is love.

Each panel presents a *contrast*: in the first, between two **objects** for our love: our brethren, and the world; in the second, between two **examples**, Cain, who hated his brother, and Christ, who loved his brethren; and in the third, between two **mechanisms** through which we share God’s character of love: as his children, and as those in whom he dwells and who dwell in him.

Finally, each panel *assures* us. In the first, the signs of life **appear** at each stage of spiritual maturity. In the second, we have the internal **witness of our hearts**. In the third, the assurance is that **we are not part of the world**, the target of God’s judgment.

Dealing with Sin

The three signs reflect the work of the Holy Spirit, who under the new covenant is conforming each believer to the image of Christ. Readers might be discouraged when they fall short.

The rest of the NT shows that this work is not immediate, but a process of growth (chart). We saw this already in the use of the verb *ginōskō* and in Peter’s exhortation to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). Paul also makes this point to the Corinthians, when he defines three kinds of people. The natural man is unsaved:

1Co 2:14 But the **natural man** receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

At the other extreme, the spiritual man has perfect discernment, and is beyond reproach:

1 Co 2:15 But **he that is spiritual** judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

The Corinthians fit neither of these categories. He recognizes them as believers, as brethren, but their lives fall short. He calls them “babes in Christ” and “carnal”:

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

Some aspects of their lives still reflect their sinful past.

Paul emphasizes this ongoing process in describing his ministry to the Colossians:

Col 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that **we may present every man perfect [complete] in Christ Jesus:**

The ultimate objective is that Christ would be “formed in” them, that they would be “perfect [complete] in Christ Jesus.” But achieving this objective requires hard labor on the part of those, like Paul, who minister to them.

1 John, with all its emphasis on the three signs of eternal life, recognizes that God’s children stumble. It opens and closes with instructions for dealing with this problem. The opening verses tell us of three forms of deception to which we (believers, not just the apostates) are vulnerable (Table 1, repeated in Table 9): careless sin, denying sin by minimizing it,

Reference	False Claim	Our Duty	God’s Provision
1:6-7	We have fellowship but walk in darkness	Walk in the light	Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us
1:8-9	We have no sin	Confess our sins	God is faithful and just to forgive
1:10-2:2	We have not sinned	?	Jesus Christ is our advocate

Table 9: How to deal with our own sin

and even claiming to have achieved full sinlessness. He encourages us by reminding us of God’s provision for each case. In the two cases where we are aware of our sin, he tells us what to do.

There remains the case of sin in our lives of which we are not aware, because the Spirit has not yet brought us to that point of maturity where we recognize some things as sin. Even though the sinful believer cannot help himself in this case, John exhorts his brethren to use their confidence before God to intercede for him, in the conclusion, 5:14-17.

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

Thus the book as a whole is an exposition of the three signs in the three panels, wrapped in an introduction and conclusion that reassure us, “You won’t achieve these all at once, but don’t lose heart. God has provided for your growth. Stay close to him and close to the assembly of his people, and your eternal life will grow.”

We might summarize the book as a whole,

God enables us to **know** that we participate in the eternal life of the Father and the Son by the righteous behavior, love toward one another, and orthodox belief that he generates within us, and to **maintain** that relationship even when we stumble.

Notes

Eternal Life

Forms: *zwh aiwnios*, *aiwnios zwh* (Jn 17:3; 1 Tim 6:12, 19), *ho zwh ho aiwnios* (1John 1:2; 2:25)

The expression appears 44x in the NT. Table 10 shows counts and hits per 1k:

Book	Hits	Hits/1k
Titus	2	3.01
1John	6	2.79
Jude	1	2.22
1Timothy	3	1.85
John	17	1.07
Romans	4	0.55
Galatians	1	0.44
Mark	2	0.17
Matthew	3	0.16
Luke	3	0.15
Acts	2	0.11

Table 10: References to Eternal Life in the NT

5:17, Verbs for Sin

Table 11 shows major Greek words for sin and their Hebrew parallels in the LXX. *ἀδικία* is the most promiscuous, with the fewest 0's in its row. It is a general word encompassing not only violation of God's law but also evil, violence, and deception in general. 1 John 5:17 does away with quibbles about irregular behavior that doesn't rise to the level of sin. It's all sin.

The core terms in Ex 34:7, *נְשָׂא עוֹן וְפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאת*, are rendered in the LXX, *ἀφαιρῶν ἀνομίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας*,

	עון	פֶּשַׁע	חַטָּאת	חַטָּא	חַמַּס	עוֹלָה, עוֹל	רָשָׁעָה, רָשָׁע	זָמָה	עֲשָׂק	שָׁקַר	אוֹן	רָעָה, רָעָה	Total
ἀδικία	72	12	3	0	14	22	2	0	4	7	4	4	215
ἁμαρτία	63	9	256	29	0	0	2	0	9	0	0	1	526
ἀσέβεια	2	28	0	0	11	0	8	9	0	0	0	0	73
ἀνομία	60	20	7	0	6	9	11	7	0	2	26	0	224
Total	233	93	298	34	60	55	45	29	15	113	84	879	

Table 11: LXX Matches for word for sin

Sin *ἁμαρτία* appears 17x in 1 John. *ἀσέβεια* is never used, and *ἀνομία* and *ἀδικία* are used only to relate them to sin:

Sin *ἁμαρτία* → lawlessness *ἀνομία*

1John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin *ἁμαρτία* transgresseth also the law *ἀνομία*: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Unrighteousness *ἀδικία* → sin *ἁμαρτία*

1John 5:17 All unrighteousness *ἀδικία* is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

Note the use of these two terms in 1:9:

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins *hamartia*, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness *adikia*.

The claims in 5:17 and 3:4 suggest that some were rationalizing their conduct along these lines:

- What really matters is keeping the letter of the law. To violate this would be ἀνομία.
- Sin ἁμαρτία is missing the mark, but it's less serious than outright breaking the law.
- There are other unpleasant things that people sometimes do, things to which other would object (ἀδικία), but just because they displease someone doesn't make them sinful.

John insists:

- All irregular actions ἀδικία are sin ἁμαρτία, 5:17
- Sin is lawlessness, 3:4

These two verses thus do away with quibbles about whether some conduct is or is not serious before God.

Some of John's contemporaries, anticipating full-blown gnosticism, may have claimed to have attained sinlessness. 3:4 and 5:17 demolish such claims. As long as believers are in the flesh, we must recognize the reality of day to day sin. Instead of rationalizing it, we need to use the means that God has provided (confession, prayer) to deal with it.

Antecedent of οὗτος in 5:20

Commentators are divided on whether the reference is to Christ, or to "he that is true," that is, the Father, whose Son the Lord Jesus is.

Alford, in my mind, offers the strongest argument for the Father: the definition of eternal life echoes John 17:3, of which he writes,

He [the Father] is eternal life in Himself, as being the fount and origin of it: He is it to us, seeing that to know Him is to possess it.¹⁴

But John 17:3 defines eternal life as knowing not just the Father, but also the Son, and 1 John is rooted in a focus on the joint life of the Father and the Son (1:2). So Alford's observation really ends up reinforcing Vine's conclusion,

Attempts to make the "This" refer either to the Father or to the Son fall short of what seems to be intended, namely, the inseparable unity of the Father and the Son in the one Godhead.¹⁵

γεννώ *gennaō* G1080 in 1 John (Table 12)

The verb does not appear in 2 or 3 John.

Here

- The perfect predominates, and always refers to the believer
- The aorist appears twice, once (active) of God as the father of believers, the other in 5:18.

It seems reasonable to understand the second aorist of Christ.

14 Alford, H. (1976). *Alford's Greek Testament: an exegetical and critical commentary* (Vol. 4, p. 515). Guardian Press.

15 Vine, W. E. (2022). *The Gospel of John / The Letters of John* (p. 451). Kingsley Books.

Conclusion, 5:13-21

Verse	Tense	Voice	Mood	Subject	Notes
2:29 Ἐὰν εἰδῆτε ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, γινώσκετε ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται .	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Believer	
3:9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει...	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Believer	
... καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται .	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Believer	
4:7 Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους· ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται , καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Believer	
5:1 Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται ...	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Believer	
... καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ...	Aorist	Active	Participle	God	
... ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ.					
5:4 Ὅτι πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον· καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν.	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Believer	
5:18 Οἶδαμεν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει...	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Believer	
... ἀλλ' ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν, καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπεται αὐτοῦ.	Aorist	Passive	Participle	Christ?	

Table 12: γεννάω in 1 John

How does this compare with the usage in the fourth gospel? The verb appears there 18 times. All are of people, except for Christ in 18:37 and indirectly in 8:41 (“we be not born of fornication,” implying that the Lord was). Here we need to distinguish whether the expression refers to natural or supernatural birth.

Verse	Tense	Voice	Mood	Subject	Notes
1:13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων, οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκός, οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρός, ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν .	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Believer	Supernatural
3:3 Ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἄμην ἀμην λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.	Aorist	Passive	Subjunctive	Believer	Supernatural
3:4 Λέγει πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Νικόδημος, Πῶς δύναται ἄνθρωπος γεννηθῆναι γέρων ὢν; ...	Aorist	Passive	Infinitive	Man	Natural
... Μὴ δύναται εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ δευτέρου εἰσελθεῖν καὶ γεννηθῆναι ;	Aorist	Passive	Infinitive	Man	Natural

Conclusion, 5:13-21

Verse	Tense	Voice	Mood	Subject	Notes
3:5 Ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.	Aorist	Passive	Subjunctive	Believer	Supernatural
3:6 Τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστίν· ...	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Man	Natural
... καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστίν.	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Believer	Supernatural
3:7 Μὴ θαυμάσης ὅτι εἶπόν σοι, Δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν.	Aorist	Passive	Infinitive	Believer	Supernatural
3:8 Τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει· οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος.	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Believer	Supernatural
8:41 ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν. Εἶπον οὖν αὐτῷ, Ἥμεῖς ἐκ πορνείας οὐ γεγεννήμεθα · ἓνα πατέρα ἔχομεν, τὸν θεόν.	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Man (implied: Christ)	Natural
9:2 Καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες, Ῥαββί, τίς ἤμαρτεν, οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ· ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννηθῆ ;	Aorist	Passive	Subjunctive	Man	Natural
9:19 καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτοὺς λέγοντες, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμῶν, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι τυφλὸς ἐγεννήθη ; Πῶς οὖν ἄρτι βλέπει;	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Man	Natural
9:20 Ἀπεκρίθησαν δὲ αὐτοῖς οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπον, Οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς ἡμῶν, καὶ ὅτι τυφλὸς ἐγεννήθη ·	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Man	Natural
9:32 Ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἠκούσθη ὅτι ἠνοιξέν τις ὀφθαλμοὺς τυφλοῦ γεγεννημένου .	Perfect	Middle	Participle	Man	Natural
9:34 Ἀπεκρίθησαν καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ, Ἐν ἀμαρτίαις σὺ ἐγεννήθης ὅλος, καὶ σὺ διδάσκεις ἡμᾶς; Καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω.	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Man	Natural
16:21 Ἡ γυνὴ ὅταν τίκτη λύπην ἔχει, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα αὐτῆς· ὅταν δὲ γεννήσῃ τὸ παιδίον, οὐκέτι μνημονεύει τῆς θλίψεως, ...	Aorist	Active	Subjunctive	Man	Natural
...διὰ τὴν χαρὰν ὅτι ἐγεννήθη ἄνθρωπος εἰς τὸν κόσμον.	Aorist	Passive	Indicative	Man	Natural
18:37 Εἶπεν οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Πιλάτος, Οὐκοῦν βασιλεὺς εἶ σύ; Ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἴ Σὺ λέγεις, ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι ἐγώ. Ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι , καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ. Πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς.	Perfect	Middle	Indicative	Christ	Natural

Table 13: γεννάω in 1 John

Here

- the perfect can refer to Christ (18:37, oblique in 8:41),
- and the aorist (1:13; 3:3, 5, 7, 8), more often than the perfect (3:6b), can refer to the spiritual birth of believers.

How about Acts 13:33 (perfect), Heb 1:5 (perfect); 5:5 (pf) ← Ps 2:7 (pf); Jn 18:37)? In fact, does any other passage ever use the aorist to speak of Christ's being born of God? His physical birth in Matt 1:20; 2:1 is the only place I can find.

τηρέω in 5:18

When believers are the subject of this verb, in John, 1 John, and the Revelation¹⁶ (e.g., 1:3), the object is always God's law, God's commandments.

When John wants to talk about believers keeping themselves, he uses φυλάσσω,

1John 5:21 Little children, **keep** yourselves from idols. Amen.

John 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall **keep** it unto life eternal.

Believers can purify themselves,

1Jn 3:3 And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. [cf. Rev 16:15]

Keeping of believers with τηρέω in John's writings is the task of the Father and the Son:

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, **keep** through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

John 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I **kept** them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept φυλάσσω, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest **keep** them from the evil.

Rev. 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will **keep** thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

This usage strongly urges us to understand the one who does the keeping as divine, that is, the Son of God.

1 John 5:19, from “of God” to “in God”

In 1 John 5:18-19a we are born “of God” ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (18, 19a), while in 20 we are “in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.” Paul recalls both of these relations in a single verse:

16 16:15 “keepeth his garments” is the closest John comes to using τηρέω of one a believer protecting himself.

1Cor. 1:30 But of him [ἐξ αὐτοῦ, i.e., God] are εἰμί ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Of him are ye in Christ Jesus—The verb “are” is explicit. You exist. Your present standing in Christ is something that comes of, from God. This is exactly the complex of ideas that John develops in 5:18-20.

Who is made unto us wisdom from God—Christ himself is the revelation of God’s wisdom to us. The description is parallel to “the word of God,” John 1:1; Rev 19:13. Recall the picture of wisdom in Prov 8:

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

In Luke, a saying that Matthew attributes to the Lord Jesus is assigned to “the wisdom of God”:

Luke 11:49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute:

In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). He embodies God’s eternal counsels of salvation, and so Paul amplifies the object of this wisdom: righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. All three recall his sacrifice on Calvary.

Righteousness—Our righteousness is not our own. It is the righteousness of God’s Son, imputed to us:

Php 3:9 ... not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

He demonstrated this righteousness by his life of obedience to the Father, most notably by becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Php 2:8).

Sanctification—Sanctification, or holiness, marks us as set apart from the sinful world. It is particularly the work of the Holy Spirit:

2Th 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: [1 Pet 1:2]

This work is promised by the New Covenant, which our Savior ratified by his sacrifice on the cross.

Redemption—Redemption is our deliverance from bondage, achieved by Christ taking our place on the cross.

Gal 3:13 Christ hath redeemed¹⁷ us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

It is the counterpart of righteousness, as he takes our sin and judgment on himself.

Thus does the Wisdom of God delight the heart of his Father, and exhibit his “delights with the sons of men” (Prov 8:31).

ἦκω *hēkō* G2240 in 5:20

Table 14 shows LXX correspondences of ἦκω *hēkō* G2240 and ἔρχομαι *erchomai* G2064.

	בוא	בוא impv	הלך	אתה		Total
ἦκω	193	5	1	3		242
ἔρχομαι	700	7	21	2		978
Total	2580	14	1555	21		

Consider verses where the two verbs appear in the same verse. ἦκω precedes

ἔρχομαι 8x, and follows it 29x. This may reflect the common sequence of a narrative announcement with ἔρχομαι, followed by ἦκω in direct speech.

Table 14: LXX Correspondences of ἦκω

NT:

Luke 13:35 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come ἦκω when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh ἔρχομαι in the name of the Lord.

John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come ἦκω to me; and him that cometh ἔρχομαι to me I will in no wise cast out.

John 8:42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came ἦκω from God; neither came ἔρχομαι I of myself, but he sent me.

Heb. 10:37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come ἔρχομαι will come ἦκω, and will not tarry.

In LXX:

Josh. 9:6 And they went ἔρχομαι to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come ἦκω from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. *marks end of journey. ἦκω in quoted speech, ἔρχομαι in narrative*

1Sam. 22:5 And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart πορεύομαι, and get thee ἦκω into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came ἔρχομαι into the forest of Hareth. *marks summary objective; imperative; ἦκω in quoted speech, ἔρχομαι in narrative*

2Sam. 14:32 And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come ἦκω hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come ἔρχομαι from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king’s face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me *imperative*

¹⁷ The vocabulary is different; this verb means “to buy out of bondage,” while the noun is “to loose from a controlling power.” But the semantics align.

2Kings 8:7 And Elisha came ἔρχομαι to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come ἦκω hither. *verbal report; ἦκω in quoted speech, ἔρχομαι in narrative*

2Chr. 20:2 Then there came ἔρχομαι some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh ἦκω a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. -- ἦκω in quoted speech, ἔρχομαι in narrative

Psa. 126:6 He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. *אָבַד אָבַד, ἦκω as finite verb*

Hab. 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. *אָבַד אָבַד, ἦκω as finite verb*

Mal. 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come ἦκω to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come ἔρχομαι, saith the LORD of hosts. *Emphasis on suddenness*

Is. 39:3 Then came ἔρχομαι Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came ἦκω they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come ἦκω from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. *ἦκω in quoted speech, ἔρχομαι in narrative*

Is. 39:6 Behold, the days come ἔρχομαι, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried ἦκω to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. *suddenness?*

Is. 66:18 For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come ἔρχομαι, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come ἦκω, and see my glory.

Jer. 4:16 Make ye mention to the nations; behold, [they have come ἦκω] publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come ἔρχομαι from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. *suddenness; quoting a report*

Jer. 40:4 And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which were upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come ἔρχομαι with me into Babylon, come ἦκω; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go. -- *imperative*

Ezek. 33:33 And when this cometh ἔρχομαι to pass, (lo, it will come ἦκω,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

Ezek. 38:8 After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come [he shall come ἔρχομαι ... and shall come ἦκω] into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them.

Idolatry in 1 John 5:21

The most immediate reference is no doubt to the true (i.e. genuine) God in 5:20. But there may be another reference.

Conclusion, 5:13-21

Not all idols are physical images. Recall that Paul characterizes covetousness as idolatry:

Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**:

John may have in mind his warning in the first love section,

1Jn 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

When we studied this section, we saw that it is based in the Shema, the fundamental Jewish confession of faith, in Deuteronomy 6:

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine **heart**, and with all thy **soul**, and with all thy ~~might~~ **wealth**.

The Lord God alone is worthy of all our love and worship. Each facet of the world challenges a dimension of Deut 6:5:

- the lust of the flesh draws our soul, our life force, away from the exclusive love of God.
- The lust of the eyes draws our wealth, our material substance, away from the love of God.
- The pride of life draws our heart, our sense of self, away from the love of God.

Paul's reference to the idol of covetousness aligns exactly with the lust of the eyes against which John warns, and the other two aspects of the world offer similar temptations. The idols of 5:21 may refer to the world's allurements that draw our love away from the true God.