

The First Panel, 2:3-28

Overview

The body of the book is organized as three panels, each dealing with the signs of righteousness, love, and belief (Table 1).¹

The discussion of each sign includes assurance to the readers that they are indeed God’s children. John’s purpose in writing is not that they might doubt their salvation, but that they might know it. In light of this, we should describe righteousness, love, and belief as *signs* of eternal life, rather than *tests*. Their purpose is not to root out false believers, but to enable true believers to recognize and cultivate the distinctive results of salvation in their own lives.

	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	4:7-5:1, Love and Belief; 5:2-5, Love, Righteousness, and Belief 5:6-12, Witnesses to Love, Righteousness, and Belief		

Table 1: The three signs of eternal life

2:3-6, The Sign of Righteousness

This section is a statement in the form of an ABCBA chiasm (3-5, Figure 1), followed by an exhortation (6) that motivates or explains the statement based on the example of the Lord Jesus.

3 And hereby we do know that we know [have known] him,—The purpose of the book (5:13) is to know that we have eternal life, which the Lord has defined in the gospel as knowing God:

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

Conclusion	:3a hereby we do know that we know [have known] him	↑ ↓	:5b hereby know we that we are in him
Condition	:3b (we know him) if we keep his commandments		:5a whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God perfected
Counterexample	:4 he that saith ... and keepeth not ... is a liar		

Figure 1: Chiastic structure of 2:3-5

The two instances of “know” in 2:3 are the same Greek verb γινώσκω *ginōskō* G1097, but with different tenses. The first is in the present tense, while the second is in the perfect, indicating an action in the past with ongoing present consequences. Every time that John speaks of knowing God (1 John 2:3-4, 13-14; 3:6), he uses the perfect tense. The new birth happens at a point in time. We pass from death into life. Our present understanding and appreciation of that life grows through time, but the fact is finished and done. The perfect tense gives John’s understanding of the spiritual state of his readers, assuring them of his confidence in their spiritual condition.

if we keep his commandments.—The first sign that we have indeed experienced this change is that we are preoccupied with what he has commanded us.²

The verb “keep” (τηρέω *tēreō* G5083) invites comparison with other verbs he could have used (see note). Though it implies that we conform ourselves to his instructions, it is not the usual Greek word for “obey.” τηρέω rather emphasizes guarding, treasuring, paying attention to, and meditating on something. Peter uses it to describe our future inheritance (chart):

1 Law starts the “righteousness” section at 1:5.

2 This is a fifth class conditional (ἐάν with subjunctive in protasis, present tense in apodosis), sometimes called a “present general condition,” the most generic and neutral condition. Wallace p. 697.

1Pe 1:4 ... an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved** in heaven for you, ...

In John 17, the Lord uses this word to describe his care, and the Father's care, for his people:

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**, 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.³

Of its 37 LXX instances, 15 are in Proverbs. It does exhort the hearer to obedience:

Prov. 3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart **keep my commandments**:

Prov. 3:21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: **keep sound wisdom and discretion**:

But it often emphasizes how wisdom keeps and protects us:

Prov. 2:11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall **keep thee**:

Prov. 4:6 Forsake [wisdom] not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall **keep thee**.

Prov. 19:16 He that keepeth the commandment **keepeth his own soul**; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.

In this last case, note the contrast with "despise." We already know from 1 John 1:6-2:2 that no one can *obey* his law perfectly, but the emphasis here is on delighting in it, meditating on it, being preoccupied with it. This is the attitude exemplified by Paul, even as he struggled with the weakness of the flesh:

Rom 7:22 For I **delight** in the law of God after the inward man:

Contrast, as in Prov 19:16,

Heb. 10:28 He that **despised** Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

The offender disobeyed the Law of Moses, but what made the sin so egregious is that he *despised* it.

4 He that saith, I know [have known] him, —The central verse of this chiasm introduces a series of statements that recall the three statements, "if we say," in 1:6, 8, and 10. The other two are in 2:6 and 2:9.⁴

These three "he that saith" statements do not cover the same ground as the three kinds of sin in 1:6-2:2. They all focus on deliberate sin (1:6-7), presenting different forms of the claim to have fellowship with him: "I know him," "I abide in him," "I am in the light" (Table 2, chart).

3 At the end of 1 John, it also probably describes the Lord Jesus' care for his body, made up of his assembled saints (1 John 5:18 "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself." We will have much more to say about this verse, and we will suggest that the one doing the keeping is the Lord Jesus, who is preserving his body, the church, from sin and the attacks of Satan.

4 Smalley

and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.—The first of these three claims is a particularly close paraphrase of 1:6, framed in terms of our attention to God’s word rather than fellowship (Table 3). The parallel suggests that fellowship manifests our intimate relation with him, and deliberate sin is what is meant by not keeping (focusing on, being preoccupied with) his commandments.

5 But whoso keepeth his word,—The corresponding element in the first panel spoke of keeping his commandments, but now we read of keeping his word. This is an even stronger indication of our devotion to the Lord than simply focusing on his commandments. The difference may be illustrated in a story about David’s mighty men:

2Sa 23:13 And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. 14 And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. 15 And **David longed, and said,** Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! 16 And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD. 17 And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it.

In the wilderness, David’s water supply was unpleasant, perhaps brackish and even stagnant. He recalled the sweet, fresh water he enjoyed as a youth from Bethlehem’s well. David would never have *commanded* his men to risk their lives to satisfy his longing, but because of their love for him, they delighted to carry out even his *word*.

in him verily is the love of God perfected:—Is “love of God” subjective genitive (the love that God exercises toward us) or objective genitive (our love for God)? The commentators vary,⁵ but some parallels in John suggest that the kind of love that motivates keeping a person’s commandments indicates a love for the authority (objective genitive), rather than the love of the authority for us. The principle goes back to the OT (chart):

Exo 20:6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that **love me, and keep my commandments.**

John mentions it frequently:

Triple Claims

<p>If we say ...</p> <p>1:6-7 Deliberate Sin: “we have fellowship,” and walk in darkness</p> <p>1:8-9 Discovered Sin: “we have no sin”</p> <p>1:10-2:2 Dark Sin: “we have not sinned</p>	}	<p>He that saith ...</p> <p>2:4 “I know him” and keepeth not his commandments ...</p> <p>2:6 he abideth in him, ought ... to walk ...</p> <p>2:9 he is in the light, and hateth his brother ...</p>
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Table 2: “He that saith” as amplification of warning against Deliberate Sin

1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him,	2:4 He that saith, I know [have known] him,	2:6 He that saith he abideth in him	2:9 He that saith he is in the light,
and walk in darkness,	and keepeth not his commandments,	ought himself also to walk, even as he walked	and hateth his brother,
we lie,	is a liar,		is in darkness even until now.
and do not the truth:	and the truth is not in him.		

Table 3: “He that saith” verses as expansion of 1:6

5 Westcott and Abbott are strong advocates for subjective genitive throughout.

1Jn 5:3 For this is the **love of God, that we keep his commandments**: and his commandments are not grievous.

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

Jhn 14:31 But that the world may know that **I love the Father**; and **as the Father gave me commandment**, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

So righteousness, the first sign of eternal life, shows our love for God. We will see a close relation between this love and the other two signs as well.⁶

hereby know we that we are in him.—The conclusion to the chiasm of 2:3-5 is John’s second statement of the form “hereby we know.” It differs from the first in what it is that we are said to know. In 2:3, our thoughtful obedience to God’s commands shows that we *have known him*. Here, it shows that we *are in him*. What is the relation between these two statements, and their relation to 5:13, *having eternal life*?

We have already seen that John 17:3 defines eternal life as knowing God. The gospel also talks about the relation of one person being “in” another person. In the upper room, when Philip asks the Lord to show him the Father, the Lord develops this thought in three steps (chart).

First, he explains that he and the Father are “in” each other.

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? 10 Believest thou not that **I am in the Father, and the Father in me?** the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth [abideth] in me, he doeth the works. ...

Being “in the Father” implies the closest possible relation with him, an intimacy of shared life and purpose. 1:2 discussed “that eternal life, which was with the Father,” the mutual fellowship within the godhead. That fellowship is here expressed as mutually being in one another.

The second step is to promise this intimacy between believers and God’s Spirit:

Jhn 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and **shall be in you**.

So the Son and the Father are “in” one another. The divine Spirit is “in” the believers. The final claim comes in v. 20.

Jhn 14:20 At that day ye shall know that **I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you**.

Here the Lord introduces this amazing concept of our being in him. Our life in Christ is not just eternal (5:13), it brings us into the knowledge of God (2:3). And that is not a static, academic knowledge, but a shared life. The Father, Son, and Spirit might be pictured as a loving family, and we are now included in that loving family.

At the end of the epistle, John ties together the ideas “in Christ,” “eternal life,” and “know God”:

1Jn 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**.

⁶ See note for discussion of the relation between our love for God and the three signs.

These three concepts are different perspectives on the same relationship (Figure 2). John 17:3 defines eternal life as “knowing the Father,” and 1 John 5:20 links both of these to being “in Christ.”

Paul picks up this relation of being “in Christ” throughout his epistles. Here are just a few of many examples (chart):

2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man **be in Christ**, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them **which are in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Rom 16:7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were **in Christ** before me.

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and **to the faithful in Christ Jesus**:

This relation is the heart of our righteous standing before God:

2Co 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God **in him**.

Ephesians 1 emphasizes that we are blessed “in him” (1:3), chosen “in him” (1:4), made accepted “in him” (1:6), redeemed “in him” (1:7), made an inheritance “in him” (1:11), trusting “in him” (1:12), and sealed “in him” (1:13).

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath **blessed us** with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places **in Christ**: 4 According as he hath **chosen us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein **he hath made us accepted in the beloved**. 7 **In whom we have redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ... 11 **In whom also we have obtained been made an inheritance**, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: **in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed** with that holy Spirit of promise,

As often, John documents teachings of our Lord that are not mentioned in the synoptics, but that Paul uses in his teaching, showing that Paul is not innovating, but basing his teaching on our Lord’s words during his earthly ministry

6 He that saith he abideth in him—The concluding exhortation to the sign of righteousness begins with the second “he that saith” statement (chart), replacing “he that saith he knoweth him” (2:4) with “he that saith he abideth in him.” Unlike 2:4 and 2:9, the claim is not contrasted with disobedience, but amplified into a positive expectation, “walk even as he walked.

In this exhortation, John introduces another expression for our relation to the Lord. He wrote in 2:5 of being “in Christ,” an expression that our Lord introduced in the upper room, in John 14. The Lord follows this teaching about being in him (John 14) with the metaphor of the vine and the branches (John 15), and enriches it with the notion of *abiding* (μένω *menō* G3306) in him, which John now adopts (chart). To understand this expression, let’s go back to the upper room.

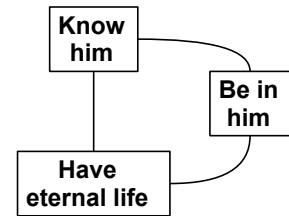


Figure 2: Equivalent relationships from 5:20

Jhn 15:4 **Abide in me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye **abide in me**. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that **abideth in me**, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man **abide not in me**, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye **abide in me**, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

The Lord already established the close relation between the two terms in John 14:

John 14:10 Believest thou not that I am $\epsilon\mu\tau$ in the Father, and **the Father in me**? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but **the Father that dwelleth $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega$ in me**, he doeth the works.

“Dwelleth” in John 14:10 is the same verb *menō* translated “abide” throughout John 15.⁷ The simple fact is that the Father is “in me.” But our Saviour could do his mighty works because the Father “dwelleth [abideth] in me.” Abiding suggests a deliberate, enduring relation, which produces results. We are not simply to acknowledge the fact that Christ is in us, but to treasure it consciously and seek to avoid any sin that might break that fellowship. That relation is the key to bearing fruit, to yielding the signs that the life of Christ is truly active in us.

Other than emphasizing perseverance, the two terms describe the same relation. We see this not only in John 14:10, but in 2:9-11. 2:9 contrasts being “in the light” and “in darkness,” 2:10 amplifies the first into “abideth in the light,” and 2:11 amplifies the second to “walketh in darkness.”

1 John 2:9 He that saith he is **in the light**, and hateth his brother, is **in darkness** even until now. 10 He that loveth his brother **abideth in the light**, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. 11 But he that hateth his brother is **in darkness**, and **walketh in darkness**, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

After the first instance of “in him” (2:5), John uses this “abide” language, until the very end, where he returns to the simple statement that we are “in him,” in his grand summary (Figure 3):

1Jn 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**.

This emphasis on abiding is consistent with his purpose, which is to outline the signs of eternal life, the fruit that we may expect from a life lived in union with him. It is interesting that John, in his pastoral care for those who are already believers, emphasizes abiding in Christ, while Paul, who was first of all an evangelist, focuses on being in Christ.

ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.—If we indeed are in such a close relation with the Lord Jesus, how can we help but imitate him in everything we do?

This general principle leads John to the second sign, that of love among the believers. Like being in him and abiding in him, this sign is based on the Lord’s teaching in the upper room,

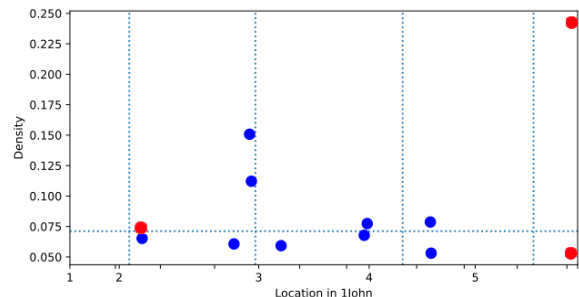


Figure 3: Simple “in Christ” (red) and “abide in Christ” (blue) in 1 John

⁷ It is also translated “continue” in 15:9 and “remain” in 15:11, 15.

2:7-17, The Sign of Love

The discussion of the second sign, like that of the first, has a summary (2:7-8, Figure 4, chart), but it comes at the beginning rather than the end, as it did in 2:6. The sign itself falls into two parts. 2:9-11 exhorts the readers to love one another, and 2:15-17 exhorts them not to love the world. In between these exhortations, he reassures them of his confidence in their eternal life.

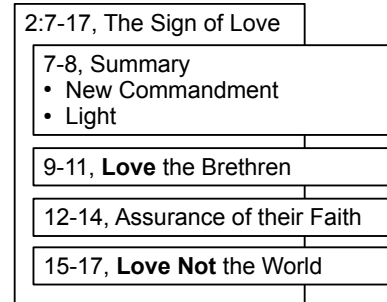


Figure 4: The Sign of Love (First Cycle)

2:7-8, Summary

7 Brethren,—This is the second vocative in the book, after 2:1, which was *Τεκνία μου*, “my little children,” emphasizing his position as their spiritual father. Vocatives are nouns that describe the hearer and that the speaker addresses to the hearer. They stand outside the sentence structure, and draw the hearer into the discourse. Contrast the statement “John was in the kitchen” (“John” is part of the sentence), with “John, you were in the kitchen” (“John” is not part of the sentence, but he is part of the communicative event).⁸

Vocatives always deserve our close attention in understanding the flow of a text. Sometimes, as in 2:1, they mark a footnote, a brief digression. Other times, as here, they mark a major structural break (see note) (chart).

In counseling them against sin, it was appropriate for him to claim them as his children. Now he places them alongside himself as a brother, to exhort them concerning the love that they owe to each other.⁹ This is the first instance in the book of the noun “brother” *ἀδελφός* *adelphos* G80, and it is concentrated in the sections that discuss the sign of love (Figure 5). In this he is mindful of the Lord’s exhortation to the disciples,

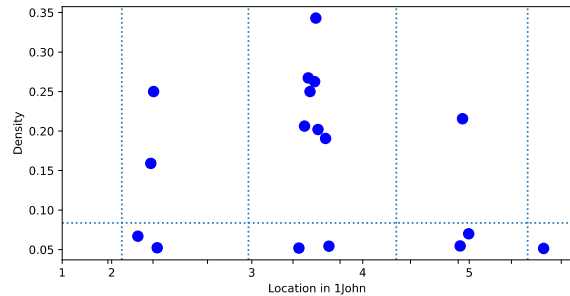


Figure 5: “Brother” *ἀδελφός* *adelphos* G80 in 1 John

Mat 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and **all ye are brethren**. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you,—What is this “old commandment” that is yet “new”? The notion of a “new commandment” recalls our Lord’s words in the upper room,

Jhn 13:34 A **new commandment** I give unto you, **That ye love one another**; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

8 Language is a set of nested structures. Sound structures are nested within word structures, which are nested within sentence structures, which are nested within discourse structures. The whole text is nested in a social structure. Each level of structure has specific markers in the language. Most of the cases that characterize nouns (nominative, dative, genitive, accusative) relate nouns to the sentence structure. The vocative gives us a glimpse of the overall social context in which the text is delivered.

9 John uses this vocative elsewhere only in 3:13. The oldest mss, followed by the critical editions, read *Ἀγαπητοί*, a common vocative in the epistle (1 John 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11), making it likely that the older mss are harmonizing. The use of a family term in this section is especially appropriate in preparing for the relational terms in 2:12-14.

The newness of that command lies in the standard for the love that is commanded. The OT commanded a love for others calibrated against our natural love for ourselves.

Lev 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour **as thyself**: I am the LORD.

The Lord is about to demonstrate a different level of love, in which he sacrifices himself for the good of his people. Now we are to love, not as we love ourselves, but as he loved us. When the disciples first heard the commandment, on the eve of the Lord’s sacrifice, it was new, for they had not witnessed the Lord’s redemptive love in action. But this command to love one another is a persistent theme throughout the NT, and by the time John writes his epistles, it is a commonplace. Note how he describes this commandment in 2 John:

2Jn 1:4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. 5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but **that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another**. 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

This summary in 2 John embraces all three of the signs: love, obedience, and belief.

which thing is true in him and in you:—The distinctive feature that sets the new commandment apart is the standard, the Lord’s love for his people (John 13:34). This love that was “true in him” is also to be true “in you.” Thus there is a strong continuity between the concluding exhortation of the first sign, in 2:6 (“walk even as he walked”) and the exhortation to the love of the second sign.¹⁰

because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.—In him, the true light is shining; in you, the darkness is passing away (present tense).

The metaphor of light (φῶς *fōs* G5457) and darkness (σκοτία *skotia* G4653) appears only in this section on loving the brethren, and in the opening summary (1:5-7), in the discussion of deliberate sin (Figure 6, chart).

1Jn 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all**. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in **darkness**, we lie, and do not the truth: 7 But if we walk in the **light**, as he is in the **light**, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

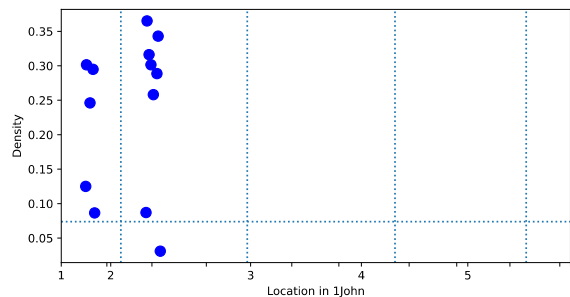


Figure 6: Light and darkness in 1 John

There, it was motivated by the notion that “God is light.” We saw that this statement is derived from our Savior’s claim to be the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Now we are told that this commandment “is true in him and in you.” Both passages emphasize our Lord as the light, and both give us a key principle to guide our conduct: we are to walk “in the light,” that is, to follow his example.

¹⁰ Alford discusses whether the commandment in view here is 2:6 or 2:9, and ends up seeing it as looking in both directions.

This idea of imitating Christ, though not the language of light and darkness, will be in focus again when we return to the theme of loving one another, in 3:16 and 4:7-11.

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.

1Jn 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 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. 11 Beloved, **if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.**

2:9-11 Love the Brethren

2:3-6 introduced us to the notion of being “in” someone, and its relation to “abiding.” That same pair of ideas appears here. We begin with being “in the light” or “in darkness” (2:9), then move to “abiding in the light” (2:10) and “walking in darkness” (2:11).

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.— This is the third “he that saith” reference, parallel again to 1:6 (Table 3, chart), like 2:6 and unlike 2:9. Profession imposes an obligation on us to live out what we claim.

Here we have the simple statements “in the light” and “in darkness.” Our Savior is “the light of the world.” If we are in him, we are in the light. Without him, we are shut out in the darkness.

The next two verses amplify these two positions, being “in the light” and “in the darkness.” The parallels between them will help us interpret them (Table 4). Let’s consider each pair together.

10 He that loveth his brother ..., 11 he that hateth his brother ...—Being in the light is incompatible with hating our brother (9a). On the contrary, it requires us to love our brother. We are a family of loving brothers and sisters. Hatred is incompatible with this relation.

10 ... abideth in the light,—He could simply have reversed 9a by saying “he that loveth his brother is indeed in the light, not in darkness.” But he uses the verb “abide” μένω *menō* G3306 that he introduced in 2:6. Simply being in the light might be understood passively. But “abide” implies our deliberate and ongoing involvement. This verse tells us one way to abide in Christ: by showing love toward our brothers and sisters in the faith.

11 ... is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, ...—On the other side, he repeats the simple statement, “is in darkness,” and then amplifies it with a statement of deliberate action, “walketh in darkness.” This parallel between abiding and walking is an excellent commentary on the meaning of abiding.

The final clause of v. 10 has two ambiguities that the parallels of Table 4 help us resolve. The KJV rendering suggests that John might have in mind Paul’s exhortation,

Loving in the Light	Hating in the Darkness
9a He that saith he is in the light ...	9b ... is in darkness
10 He that loveth his brother	11 But he that hateth his brother
abideth in the light,	is in darkness, and walketh in darkness,
and there is none occasion of stumbling	and knoweth not whither he goeth,
in him it [the light]	because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Table 4: Parallels between 2:10, 11

Rom 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

This would imply that

- a. the stumbling we are trying to avoid is that of our brother, and
- b. this “occasion of stumbling” would lie in the one who fails to love his brother.

But the parallels point in another direction.

10 ... and there is none occasion of stumbling ..., 11 ... and knoweth not whither he goeth ...—The first ambiguity is to understand who is stumbling. The parallel is “he knoweth not whither he goeth.” That is, the one at risk of stumbling is the person doing the loving or hating.

10 ... in him, 11 ... because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.—The second ambiguity is the antecedent of the pronoun translated “in him” in 2:10. In 2:11, the cause of stumbling is the darkness. Recognizing the parallel, we should understand the pronoun in 2:10 to refer, not to the person who is loving his brother (“him”), but to the light (“it”), a translation that is consistent with the Greek form of the pronoun.¹¹

2:9-11 are thus built on our Lord’s statement in John’s gospel:

Jhn 11:9 Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. 10 But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

The Lord Jesus is the light of the world. To abide in him is to walk in the day, to abide in the light, to enjoy his direction and instruction in everything that we do. In particular, it will lead us to love those who, like us, walk in his light. This blessed care will keep us from stumbling, from going astray, in our daily lives.

There is another dimension of love that John wishes to discuss. Eternal life defines not only whom and what we love, but what we do not love, and that is the subject of 2:15-17. But before entering into that discussion, he pauses to reassure them that his exhortations are not meant as condemnations or criticisms. He writes, not that they might doubt, but that they might know, that they have eternal life.

2:12-14, Assurance of their Condition

As in the first sign (the perfect tense “have known”), so in the second, he hastens to encourage them in their faith. Again, John uses a strong internal parallelism (Table 5, chart).

Before we work through the parallels, let’s consider the relation among the terms “little children,” “fathers,” and “young

	2:12-13a	2:13b-14
Little Children	12 your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake	13c ye have known the Father
Fathers	13a ye have known him that is from the beginning	14a ye have known him that is from the beginning
Young Men	13b ye have overcome the wicked one	14b ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one

Table 5: The Assurances of 2:12-14. “Write” is past tense in shaded cells.

¹¹ The dative pronoun οὐτῷ has the same form in the masculine and in the neuter. “Light” is neuter, and is a legitimate antecedent of the pronoun.

men.” It is tempting to see three stages of spiritual life, in the same spirit as Paul’s distinction between carnal Christians, whom he also calls babes in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-4), and spiritual believers (1 Cor 2:15-16).¹² There are two difficulties with this idea.

First, John uses two different terms for “little children.” In 2:12 they are *τεκνία teknia* G5040, bairns or born ones, while in 2:13 they are *παῖδια paidia* G3813, youths. If the name were a technical term for a stage in growth, a baby Christian, we would expect the same word in both places.

Second, he uses both terms elsewhere in the epistle to describe his readers in general, without regard to spiritual maturity, *teknia* in 2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; *paidia* in 2:18.

More likely, the first statement in each panel is a general statement that is true of all of his readers. (Of course, this means that it is true of the very youngest believers.) The second and third statement distinguish two stages of maturity, “young men” and “fathers.” This twofold division is echoed elsewhere in the NT:

1 Tim 5:1 Rebuke not an **elder**, but intreat him as a father; and the **younger men** as brethren;

Tit 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That **the aged men** be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. ... 6 **Young men** likewise exhort to be sober minded.

1 Pet 5:1 The **elders** which are among you I exhort ... 5 Likewise, ye **younger**, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility:

We should also note that in the first four elements, John uses the present tense “I write unto you,” while in the fifth and sixth he uses the past “I wrote.” We’ll see that the fifth and sixth are essentially repetitions of the second and third, while the first four all make distinct points introduced for the first time.

Finally, the central verb in each proposition is in the perfect tense, emphasizing something that has been done in the past with continuing consequences.

Let’s consider each pair together to facilitate comparison.

The first pair, “little children,” describe the condition of all the believers, whether young or old.

12 I write unto you, little children τεκνία, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.—This is the most fundamental truth, which is true of every believer. “Forgiven” is the same verb ἀφίημι *afiēmi* G863 we saw in 1:9, “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” It refers to the removal of sins, not just a setting aside of the penalty.

1:9 stated that God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins”—faithful in fulfilling his promise (notably Exod 34:6-7), and just because of the sacrifice of a righteous substitute. Here again he justifies this forgiveness, this time by reference to “his name.” In the Bible a name is not just a label. It describes a person’s basic character. It is worth noting that God’s commitment to forgive his people’s sin in Ex 34:6-7 is presented to Moses as “the name of the Lord” (chart):

Exo 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed **the name of the LORD.**

12 I understood them this way in my paper on Law and the Christian Life (<https://cyber-chapel.org/DoctrinalStudies/LawChristianLife/LawAndTheChristianLife.pdf>). Paul’s third category, the natural man (1 Cor 2:14), is not a believer.

6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed,
The LORD, The LORD God,
merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy
for thousands,
forgiving [bearing] iniquity and transgression and sin,
and that will by no means clear the guilty;
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children,
unto the third and to the fourth generation.

His most basic character combines deep love and pure holiness with a commitment to “forgive [bear] iniquity and transgression and sin,” bearing the penalty of that sin so that they can be delivered from it. Here, in the words of the sons of Korah,

Psa 85:10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

It is on the basis of this name, in consistency with his basic character, that he removes our sins.

13c I write unto you, little children παιδιά, because ye have known the Father.—The corresponding element in the second panel explains why the removal of sin is important. Before they experienced the removal of sin (2:12), their condition was described by Isaiah:

Isa 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Now their sin is gone, removed forever, and the door to fellowship with the Father is open. And we should never forget, as we work through this book, that this fellowship is what John desires for them:

1Jn 1:3 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.

Next he turns his attention to the older believers in the fellowship.

13a I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. —“Him that is from the beginning” is almost certainly the Lord Jesus, otherwise he would not be saying anything distinctive about the Fathers. He may have in mind his description of the Messiah in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word.”

Asserting the eternal preexistence of the Son is a direct response to the challenge of the false teachers that Jesus is not the eternal Son of God. But John is not just saying that they know *that* he is from the beginning. Rather, as in 2:13b, he is asserting a relation. Paul helps us understand the nature of this special relation with the Son in Philippians 3,

Php 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of **the knowledge γνῶσις of Christ Jesus my Lord**: ... 10 **That I may know γινώσκω him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Our salvation, ultimately, is participation in “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:9-10). To know the Lord Jesus, to enter into “the fellowship of his sufferings” and experience “the power of his resurrection,” is the goal of a lifetime, and the more mature believers have tasted of this identification.

14a I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.—The corresponding element in the second panel is identical with that in the first, and thus John shifts from the present tense to the past tense, “I have written.” Knowing the Son of God, in the sense of participating in his sufferings and his power, is the pinnacle of Christian experience. Nothing more can be said.

13b I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.—We recognize the word “overcome” (νικάω *nikaō* G3528, chart) from the Revelation, where 17 of its 28 NT instances appear. Except for one instance in Luke (11:22) and three in Romans (3:4; 12:21 *bis*), all the instances are in John. The first is John 16:33, “I have overcome the world.” 1 John uses the word most densely, six times per 1000 words.

- Here and v. 14, it describes the energetic victory of the young men over “the wicked one.”
- 4:4 explains this victory: “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” Our spiritual combat is really the striving of the Spirit of God within us against the spirit of Antichrist.
- 5:4, 5 uses the word three times as victory over “the world,” because we are (perfect: have been) begotten of God. (We are about to learn much more of “the world” in 2:15-17.)

Here is encouragement for younger believers who feel themselves overwhelmed with spiritual opposition. It may seem strange to describe this victory in the perfect tense, when we consider how painful the conflict is. And John later (5:4, 5) describes the victory in the present tense, as ongoing. But the perfect here, and in 4:4, encourages us with the certainty of this victory, because of the intrinsic superiority of “he that is in you.”

14b I have written unto you, young men, because ... ye have overcome the wicked one.—“I have written” is in the past tense because his main assertion is the same: “ye have overcome the wicked one.” Again, “overcome” is perfect tense, reflecting the certainty of their victory. But he does add two present-tense clauses that explain how they have attained this victory.

because ye are strong,—Strength is an attribute naturally associated with youth:

Pro 20:29 The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.

The strength of youth is a gift that we should not take for granted. But it needs to be directed, and that’s why John adds the next clause.

and the word of God abideth in you,—Up until now, we have focused on “abide” as describing our relation to the Lord Jesus. John also uses the word to describe other relations. Here, he is emphasizing the need for God’s word to abide in us. As before, “abide” indicates persistence. It is not enough simply to read the Bible. We must internalize it, meditating on it constantly.

Psa 1:2 But his **delight** is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he **meditate** day and night.

The Lord Jesus abides in us, and he is the word of God, but that’s probably not the focus here. John is more likely thinking about the Scriptures, the “word” that he has exhorted us to keep in 2:5, “whoso keepeth his word.” Perhaps John is recalling the Psalm,

Psa 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto **according to thy word.**

Or Paul’s exhortation,

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:**

There is a close relation between our abiding in the Lord and his word abiding in us.

Jhn 15:7 If **ye abide in me**, and **my words abide in you**, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

The strength of youth, guided by careful attention to the Word of God, is a powerful weapon for spiritual warfare, and will enable you to overcome the wicked one.

2:15-17, Do Not Love the World

Having completed his encouragement, John now outlines the other side of the sign of love. We must not only to love our brothers and sisters, but also guard against loving the world.

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.—John often talks about something that he calls the “world” (κόσμος *kosmos* G2889). His epistle and gospel use more than half (102/187) of the NT instances. 1 John uses the word most frequently (1.1% of its words), while John is second at 0.5%.

This word is distinct from the word “earth” (γῆ *gē* G1093), which dominated the Revelation.¹³ Both terms are contrasted with heaven (chart):

Jhn 8:23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this **world**; I am not of this **world**.

Col 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the **earth**.

But *gē* describes the physical planet, while *kosmos* emphasizes its organization. In the LXX, the word never describes our planet, but refers to things that are ordered or intended to adorn. Its most common Hebrew correspondents are צבא *tsabaʿ* H6633 “host (of heaven),” viewed as an organized army, and עדי *ʿady* H5716, an ornament, a meaning that appears in 1 Pet 3:3:

1Pet. 3:3 Whose **adorning** (*kosmos*) let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;

One careful commentator observes,

The fundamental idea of κόσμος in St John is that of the sum of created being which belongs to the sphere of human life as an ordered whole, considered apart from God.¹⁴

After the initial statement that our Lord is a propitiation “for the whole world” (2:2), *kosmos* peaks three times in 1 John (Figure 7). Our present section tells us not to love it. In 4:1-5, the second discussion of the sign of belief, it warns against the false teaching:

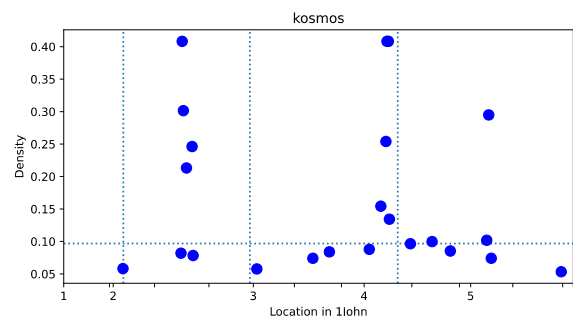


Figure 7: κόσμος *kosmos* G2889 in 1 John

13 Interestingly, γῆ does not appear at all in 1 John, and appears only 13x, less than 0.1% of the words, in John, while Revelation uses κόσμος only 3x, “the kingdoms of this world” (11:5) and “the foundation of the world” (13:8; 17:8).

14 Westcott, B. F., & Westcott, A., eds. (1908). The Gospel according to St. John Introduction and notes on the Authorized version (p. 31, on John 1:10). J. Murray.

1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the **world**. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the **world**. 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**. 5 They are of the **world**: therefore speak they of the **world**, and the **world** heareth them.

Finally, in 5:4-5, it tells us that we overcome the world by believing the true teaching, that Jesus is the Son of God:

1Jn 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the **world**: and this is the victory that overcometh the **world**, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the **world**, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Both of these passages associate the world with the false teaching that denies that our Lord is both God and man. This teaching is promoted by the spirit of Antichrist, and his master Satan is called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), so it is not surprising that the world shows up in these contexts. In addition, our present passage is immediately followed by the first discussion of the sign of belief (2:18-28). Thus the current paragraph, about not loving the world, serves as a transition. Looking back to the sign of love, it reminds us that there are things we must *not* love. Looking forward to the sign of belief, it alerts us that this world system is dominated by the spirit of Antichrist, which denies our Lord’s join human-divine nature.

He now gives two reasons not to love the world.¹⁵

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.—The first reason is that loving the world is incompatible with loving the Father (objective genitive). This principle is based on Israel’s fundamental confession of faith, the *Shema* (chart):

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.

The Lord demands our complete, undivided love, and calls our attention to three fundamental human appetites that compete with him for our devotion. Figure 8 summarizes these three appetites, and their relation to 1 John 2:16.

16 For all that is in the world,—The key to understanding 2:16 is recognizing it as an exposition of the three requirements of Deut 6:5. Each of the elements of the world corresponds to one of the three dimensions in Deut 6:5. In other words, “the world” is the alternative to God that our own appetites hold out to us. The insight here, that we are misled by our own lusts, recalls James,

Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is **drawn away of his own lust**, and enticed.

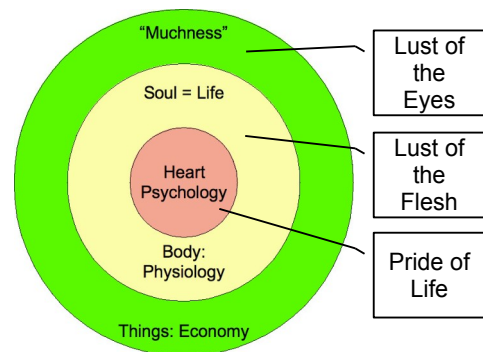


Figure 8: The three dimensions of human nature from Deut 6:4-5 (cf. D.I. Block, *JETS* 47:2 (2004) p. 203)

¹⁵ Smalley (WBC) identifies the two motives.

the lust of the flesh,—The soul (נֶפֶשׁ *nepesh* H5315) in Deut 6:4 is our life force. In fact, the KJV translates it 118 times in the OT as “life.” God has given us basic biological drives to remind us to take care of this beautiful machine that is our body. But if we do not submit our soul, our life force, to the Lord, we become controlled by fleshly appetites. John calls this “the lust of the flesh.”

and the lust of the eyes,—The word in Deut 6:5 that our version translates “might” (רִצְוֹן *meḥod* H3966) is literally “muchness,” and in later Hebrew refers to wealth. Its basis is an appreciation for what is beautiful, enabling us to worship God for his creation. But if we do not submit it to the Lord, it becomes greed and selfishness. We cannot simply enjoy beauty, but must possess and control it. This is “the lust of the eyes.”

and the pride of life,—The heart in the OT is the seat of our self-consciousness and identity, of our psychology. It is necessary for us to distinguish ourselves from others, and thus to engage in love and fellowship. But if we do not submit it to the Lord, it leads to self-centered pride. This is “the pride of life.”

This three-dimensional analysis of human nature is cited throughout the Bible.¹⁶ It lies behind the three elements of the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6, the law of Israelite kingship in Deuteronomy 17 that Solomon violated in 1 Kings 10-11, the different kinds of soil in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, and many other passages. In particular, it characterizes the fall in the garden of Eden (chart):

Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was **good for food** [lust of the flesh], and that it was **pleasant to the eyes** [lust of the eyes], and a tree to be **desired to make one wise** [pride of life], she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

He tried to tempt our Lord along the same three lines, but failed:

Mat 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made **bread** [lust of the flesh]. ... 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, **cast thyself down** [into the temple, attracting great following: pride of life]: ... 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and **sheweth him** all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; [lust of the eyes].

The first reference in the Bible to this pattern is Genesis 3. The last that I have found is this one, in 1 John.

is not of the Father, but is of the world.—Satan rules the world system through the same three human appetites that he used with Eve, and that he tried to use with our Lord. Those who have eternal life, who are abiding in Christ, must not yield to them, but obey Deut 6:4-5 in submitting them to the Lord.

So the first reason not to love the world is that it is incompatible with loving the Father, and in fact directly violates God’s fundamental requirement in Deut 6:4-5. Now John gives a second reason.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof:—This current world order, driven by the principle of satisfying our desires, is temporary. Our Savior pronounced its doom in John 12:

Jhn 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

16 For full discussion, see <https://cyber-chapel.org/DoctrinalStudies/ThreeChoices/ThreeChoices.pdf>.

In the gospel, John three times describes Satan as “the prince of this world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). And where the leader is cast out, the organization of his dominion will necessarily change:

1Co 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; 30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for **the fashion¹⁷ of this world passeth away.**

If the world’s allurements seem overwhelming, we should remind ourselves that it’s all temporary, and will surely pass away. In comparison, ...

but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.—But God’s children have eternal life (5:13). Our true interests cannot be tied to a transient order. As Paul says, we may “use the world,” but John emphasizes his warning that we must not abuse it.

The warning against the world leads John to introduce the third sign of eternal life, the core belief of Christianity, which the false teachers have denied, thus supporting Antichrist’s claims over the world.

2:18-28, The Sign of Belief

18 Little children,—Here is another vocative, and as in 2:7, it serves to mark a section break, as we move from the test of love to the test of belief.

We observed in 2:12 and 2:13 that John uses two different words for “little children.” The most common one is τεκνίον *teknion* G5040, bairns or born ones, used in 2:12, which appears in the vocative in 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. This is the other term, παιδίον *paidion* G3813, youths, which appears only here and in 2:13.

This section is a five-level balanced chiasm (Table 6, chart). Like the alternations we have seen before, such a balanced structure enables us to identify John’s main points.

The first panel of the chiasm focuses mostly on the false believers who have left the

Theme	First Panel		Second Panel
Someone coming	18, Antichrist shall come		28, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming .
Abiding μένω <i>menō</i> G3306 with the assembly vs. Christ	19 they went out, [did not] continue <i>menō</i> with us		28 And now, little children, abide in him;
Divine Unction/Anointing χρίσμα <i>chrisma</i> G5545 brings knowledge	20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.		27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie , and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.
John’s letter counters deception	21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.		26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce [deceive] you.
Doctrine at stake: relation of the Son and the Father	22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son . 23 Whosoever denieth the Son , the same hath not the Father :		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 in the Son , and in the Father . 25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

Table 6: The chiasm of 2:18-28. Blue: abide. Red: lie, deceive

17 σχῆμα *schēma* G4976, outward form or appearance (see Trench §1xx on difference between σχῆμα and μορφή *morfē* G3444)

assembly. Only once does it use the key verb “abide” (μένω *menō* G3306), in saying that the false teaches did not *abide* (KJV “continue”) with the rest of the assembly. By contrast, the second panel uses this word six times, making this section one of the foci of this important theme (Figure 9). (The other major peak, in 4:12-16, also focuses on the sign of belief.)

As before, we will move through the table row by row to compare the corresponding verses.

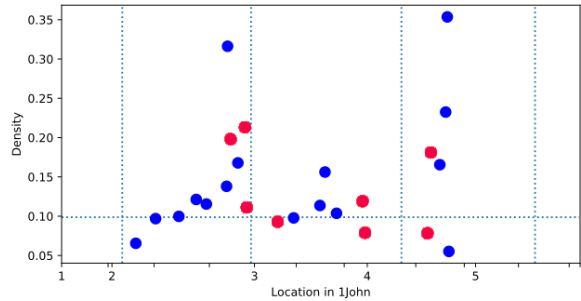


Figure 9: Abide *menō* in 1 John (red: in Christ, compare Figure 3)

2:18, 28b, The Coming Ones

The outermost members of the chiasm anticipate someone who is coming: first, the Antichrist, and then, the Lord Jesus.

it is the last time [hour]:—At the end of the last section, 2:17, John’s second motive not to love the world was that this world is passing away. That insight is the basis for recognizing that we are now in the last time.

The phrase “last time,” twice in this verse, is actually “the last hour” [ὥρα *hōra* G5610], an expression found only here in the Bible. Much more common, in both the OT and NT, is the expression “last day” or “end of the days” [ἡμέρα *hēmera* G2250].¹⁸ The shift from “days” to “hour” suggests an enhanced sense of urgency on John’s part.

and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time [hour].—John is the only NT writer to use the term “antichrist” (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7),¹⁹ but this character clearly appears elsewhere in the Bible. Paul warned of the coming “man of sin,” whose appearing would follow “a falling away,” a time of doctrinal departure, and would precede “that day,” the day of Christ (chart):

2Th 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and **that man of sin be revealed**, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

This description is consistent with the beast from the sea in Revelation 13, whose worship is promoted by the beast from the earth, the false prophet. Our Lord refers to this character in the Olivet Discourse:

Mat 24:15 When ye therefore shall see **the abomination of desolation**, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

He himself cites Daniel, who describes a coming figure, one who disrupts the worship of God:

Dan 9:27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and **for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate**, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. [cf. Dan 11:31; 12:11]

18 See note. The NT also has references to “the last time,” using two different words for “time.”

19 See Trench §xxx on the relation of this term to “false Christ,” Matt. xxiv. 24; Mark xiii. 22.,

But even before that final personality appears, John recognizes many people, motivated by the same spirit, who are active in the churches. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians, sees the same thing happening perhaps forty years earlier:

2Th 2:7 For **the mystery of iniquity doth already work**: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

The church should be aware that “antichrist shall come.” They should expect spiritual threats to the integrity of biblical truth and fellowship, and be prepared to meet them. At the same time, they must never forget that someone else is also going to come:

28b [abide in him], that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.—The immediately preceding phrase, “abide in him,” shows that the pronouns in this verse refer to the Lord Jesus, the one in whom we are to abide. He has promised to come.

The warning about not being ashamed recalls our Lord’s exhortations at the end of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), warning his people to be prepared for his unexpected return:

- Matt 24:37-39, the days of Noah
- Matt 24:43-44, watching for the thief
- Matt 24:45-51, the faithful and wise servant, waiting for his Lord’s return
- Matt 25:1-13, the ten virgins
- Matt 25:15-30, the talents.

John has these exhortations in mind as he exhorts his readers to watch for the coming, not only of the Antichrist, but of the true Lord Jesus Christ, and to conduct their lives in such a way that they will not be ashamed when he arrives unexpectedly.

2:19, 28a, Departing and Abiding

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us:—Note the chiasm ABBA, the inner members (“not of us, for if they had been of us”) contrasting their true unity with the assembly, the outer members (“they went out from us ... continued with us”) their continued engagement with the group.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us;²⁰—“From us” and “of us” are the same Greek idiom, ἐξ ἡμῶν. Some might be discouraged over the departure of some of their number, but John reflects that, after all, they were never really “from us.” It is well to remember that not all who may associate *with* the believers are necessarily *of* the believers.

they would no doubt have continued with us:—“Continue” is μένω *menō* G3306. This is the only instance of this verb in the first panel of the chiasm, but as the matching element shows, the verb dominates 2:24-28, thus contrasting the antichrists with those to whom he writes. It also reminds us of the many dimensions of of abiding.

- We abide in him, 2:6, and he in us, 3:24
- His word abides in us, 2:24
- We abide in fellowship with others in his body (the focus here).

These are not independent, but are all part of abiding in the vine and sharing its life.

20 This panel of the chiasm is itself chiastic: Ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθον, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν, with the repeated prepositional phrase on the outside, but the verbs “went out” and “were” on the inside. So we have a chiasm (2:19a) as part of a chiasm (2:19), which itself is part of an even larger chiasm (2:18-28).

There is an important difference between the verb here and in the second panel. Most instances of *menō* in 1 John use the preposition “in,” following the Lord’s teaching in John 15 of abiding “in” the vine.²¹ Here, John does not say “continued in us,” but “continued with (μετά *meta* G3326) us.” They never were truly “in” the body, but only associated with it for a time.

but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.—The departure of these people shows their true nature.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; ...—The remedy to leaving the assembly is not to abide in the assembly, but to abide in Christ. If we truly abide in him, we will cherish the gatherings of God’s people, and take every opportunity to be with them.

2:20, 27, The Divine Anointing

As we see repeatedly, John is at pains to reassure his readers that he is not challenging their salvation. Both elements in this correspondence, like the perfect tenses in 2:3-6 and 2:12-14, assure them of his confidence in their spiritual state.

The key parallelism here, unfortunately obscured in the KJV, is the repetition of the word “unction” (2:20) or “anointing” (2:27a), which are the same Greek word *χρῖσμα* *chrisma* G5545, and its only instances in the NT. The word comes from a verb that means “to anoint,” and recalls the oil that was used to anoint the OT prophets, priests, and kings. The title “Christ” comes from the same root, and describes our Lord as the anointed one.

The OT associates this act of anointing with the giving of the Holy Spirit (chart):

1Sa 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and **anointed** him in the midst of his brethren: and the **Spirit** of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Isa 61:1 The **Spirit** of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath **anointed** me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; (quoted by Christ of himself, Lk 4:18)

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in this section, but it is prominent in the second belief section in 1 John (Figure 10). Recognizing the “anointing” as the gift of God’s Spirit ties these two sections together. It also reminds us of how the Spirit reassures us of our position in Christ, as John continues to assure his readers:

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

Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, **if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.**

Eph 1:13 ... in whom also after that ye believed, ye were **sealed with that holy Spirit**

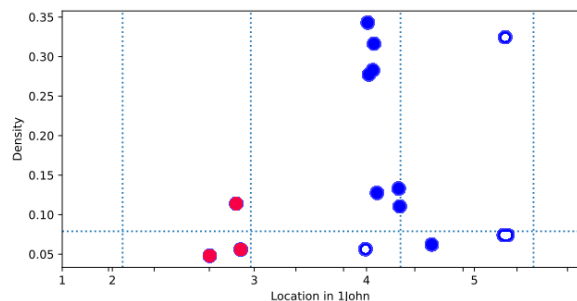


Figure 10: *Unction, anointing* (red, *χρῖσμα* *chrisma* G5545) (red) and *Spirit* (blue, *πνεῦμα* *pneuma* G4151). Solid = belief sections

21 Of 24 instances of the verb in 1 John, the only ones that do not take ἐν are here and in 2:17, where it takes no preposition.

of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.²²—At first, this sounds extreme.²³ But it aligns with the Lord’s promises in the upper room when he taught the disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit (chart):²⁴

Jhn 14:26 But the Comforter, which is **the Holy Ghost**, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you **all things**, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Jhn 16:13 Howbeit when he, **the Spirit of truth**, is come, he will guide you into **all truth**: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

We need to keep in mind that John repeatedly emphasizes the *position* of believers in the Lord, and describes as complete characteristics of believers that other texts view as in process.²⁵

- Here, “ye know all things,” though we learn through time:
1Co 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
- In 2:27, “ye need not that any man teach you,” but Hebrews laments,
Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, **ye have need that one teach you again** which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
- In 2:13, 14, the fathers “have known him that is from the beginning,” but Paul, speaking of this knowledge of Christ, aspires to this knowledge:
Php 3:10 That I may know him, ... 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: ... 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended
- In the same two verses, the young men “have overcome the wicked one,” but in the Revelation, the verb regularly appears in the present tense, as an ongoing process.

The second panel repeats the theme of the unction (anointing), and the knowledge of all things.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you,—We saw that the anointing refers to the Holy Spirit, so this statement repeats the promise of the Lord,

Jhn 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the **Spirit of truth**; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for **he dwelleth [abideth] with you, and shall be in you.**

This correspondence in the chiasm is emphasizing the knowledge available to the believers, a capability consistent with the emphasis in 2:20,27 on knowing all truth.

22 The reading now generally accepted, “you all have knowledge,” may have arisen in an attempt to soften what is seen as an unrealistic statement, but the parallels in the gospel, as well as v. 27, favor the majority reading.

23 Thus Calvin seeks to soften it: “when he says that they knew all things, it is not to be taken in the widest sense, but ought to be confined to the subject treated of here” (the schism?)

24 Like the emphasis on abiding, this section relies heavily on the upper room discourse. In some ways, 1 John can be viewed as an exposition of that discourse.

25 3.2% of the words and 16% of the verbs in 1 John are perfect tense verbs, more than any other book in the NT.

The First Panel, 2:3-28

The transition from “with” to “in” occurred on the day of Pentecost, when the promise of the New Covenant was fulfilled,

Ezk 36:27 And **I will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

and ye need not that any man teach you:—This clause seems paradoxical. If they don’t need anyone to teach them, why is John writing them his epistle? And what about the teachers whom God has placed in the church (1 Cor 12:27-30)?

Here and in v. 20, it is critical to recognize the plural number of the pronouns (chart). These assurances are given to the assembly, not to any individual. John is not encouraging any individual believer that he can do without other teachers. Rather, he is assuring the assembly, *as an assembly*, that they are competent to understand God’s will.

The schismatics who have left probably posed as especially qualified teachers whose special knowledge the others should respect. This notion of special, secret knowledge that must be learned from qualified experts was central to the gnostic heresies of the second century, which many see as the ultimate expression of the errors John is fighting here. John is assuring the assembly that they are fully competent, and in fact responsible, to evaluate whatever they hear, following the example of the Bereans (chart):

Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, **whether those things were so.**

This responsibility is the consistent exhortation of the NT. The apostles, even as they are writing Scripture, encourage their readers to exercise their spirit-empowered discernment:

1Th 5:19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 **Prove all things;** hold fast that which is good.

1Co 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and **let the other judge.**

1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **try the spirits** whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

The apostles envision the local assembly as having, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the resources necessary to instruct the saints. Recall Paul’s description of the local assembly, enjoying the spirit-gifted ministry of all the members:

Eph 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted **by that which every joint supplieth**, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

When the church gathers to remember the Lord,

1Co 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. 30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. 31 For **ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn**, and all may be comforted.

Peter exhorts the elder men in the assembly,

1Pe 5:1 The elders **which are among you** I exhort, ... 2 Feed the flock of God **which is among you**, ...

The fact that John is writing a letter to instruct them is not an exception to this principle. His address of his readers as “my little children” (2:1; 3:18) suggests that he led his readers to Christ and exercised a pastoral role among them. He is not coming to them as an external authority.

John is not denying the value of teachers whose ministry extends beyond a single local church. God’s people delight in the word of God, and it is refreshing to gather with others for special times of Bible study and exhortation. And it is often helpful to consult commentaries, written by gifted brothers whom we have never met, in thinking through a text. But many assemblies today do not encourage the development and exercise of local teachers, instead relying on teachers from outside the assembly, whether seminary-trained pastors as in conventional churches, or as itinerant teachers supported by many churches. The NT vision is that the local assembly, under the enabling of the Spirit, will have the resources needed to instruct and build up the saints.

The discussion of the anointing closes with a lengthy conditional statement that concludes in the assurance, “ye shall abide in him,” before moving out to the next pair of elements, contrasting the departing antichrists with the abiding believers. Consider the elements of this condition:

but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things ἐπι πάντων,—This recapitulates what 2:20 and the first part of 2:27 have already said. The work of the Holy Spirit ensures that the assembly knows whatever it needs to know.

and is truth true,—Four times John calls the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of truth”: John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; and 1 John 4:6. They can be confident in the truth of what he leads them, as an assembly, to accept.

and is no lie,—To further assure their doubts, he repeats the theme of deception that dominates the central part of the chiasm.

This assurance is necessary because those who departed no doubt insisted that they had the truth, and that those who did not follow them were mired in error. John wants to encourage those who remain faithful.

and even as it hath taught you,—The schism itself shows that they did not go along with the false teaching. As a healthy body rejects a foreign object, their stand for the truth the Spirit had taught them led to the departure of the heretics.

ye shall abide in him.²⁶—The conclusion of this conditional statement, and the ultimate fruit of the Spirit’s anointing, is the believer’s abiding in Christ, and thus in the fellowship of his people.

2:21, 26, John’s Letter Counters the Deception

John marks the fourth level in the chiasm by referring to the letter that he is currently writing. (The past tense, “have written,” is common in ancient Greek letters. It reflects John’s awareness that time will pass between his writing and when they read his words.) This section, in both panels, also introduces the concept of deception, which continues into the fifth correspondence as one reads into the chiasm, and then into the third on the way out. The antichrists have been teaching something that is not true, and John is writing to correct that deception.

This concept is concentrated here and in ch. 1 (Figure 11, chart). This repetition suggests that the false claims in ch. 1, “if any man say,” were introduced by the false teachers.

26 The last clause connects this element in the chiasm with the next one, which emphasizes “abiding.” The Alexandrian mss omit one vowel, making this verb an imperative. But a significant majority reading is indicative, and a word of assurance in the face of the departing heretics certainly fits the context.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.—Again, he hastens to encourage them in their standing. These instances of “know” are again in the perfect tense.

26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce [deceive] you.—

Throughout the Bible, Satan’s primary mode of attack is deception, denying what God has said. In the garden of Eden, God warned that if Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, they would die (Gen 2:17), but Satan said to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (3:4). Our Lord characterized him in this way:

Jhn 8:44 When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for **he is a liar, and the father of it.**

And Paul emphasizes this characteristic when he describes the antichrist:

2Th 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and **lying** wonders, 10 And with all **deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the **truth**, that they might be saved.

Because Satan’s primary mode of attack is by deception, we should put a priority on knowing the truth, which is epitomized in God’s word. Thus when the Savior prayed that the Father would keep the disciples from the evil one, he prayed,

Jhn 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Thus we should always place a high priority on knowing God’s word. It is the sword of the Spirit in spiritual conflict (Eph 6:17), our surest guide to distinguishing true believers and antichrists.

2:22-23, 24-25, The Doctrine at Stake

The center two elements of the chiasm detail the point of doctrine that is at stake.

22 Who is a the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?—“Jesus” here is the human name, “Jehovah is salvation,” prescribed by the angel in revealing to Joseph the miraculous birth of Mary’s son (chart),

Mat 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

“The Christ” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ *mashiach* H4899, a title assigned to David and his descendants, and ultimately to one called the Son of God,

Psa 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his **anointed**, ... 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, **Thou art my Son**; this day have I begotten thee.

The issue at stake is whether the human Jesus, born to Mary, is the divine Son, begotten by God.

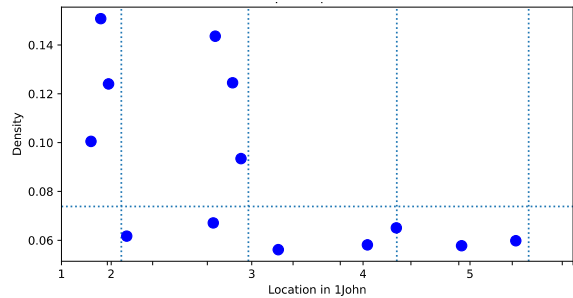


Figure 11: Words for deception in 1 John: ψεύδομαι *pseudomai* G5574 “deceive,” πλανᾶω *planaō* G4105 “lead astray,” ψεύστης *pseustēs* G5543 “liar,” ψεῦδος *pseudos* G5579 “lie,” ψευδοπροφήτης *pseudoprophetēs* G5578 “false prophet,” πλάνη *planē* G4106 “error”

He is [the] antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.—The false teachers denied this essential relation between God the Father and Jesus as his Son. To judge from later gnostic teachings, they held one of two positions. Some of them (Cerinthus) taught that the divine Son came upon the man Jesus at his baptism, and left him at the cross, while others (the Docetists) taught that Jesus was not really human, but a divine being who only took on human appearance.

23a Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father:—John asserts of these false teachers that by denying the true nature of Jesus as the Son of God, they have cut themselves off from God. Compare the words of the Lord Jesus,²⁷ noting the italics:

Jhn 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that **I am he**, ye shall die in your sins.

Jhn 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, **I am**.

The expression “to have God” as an expression of our relation to him appears only here and in 2 John 9. But it reflects certain OT expressions that describe God as the possession of his people. For example, people claim him as their portion חֵלֶק *xelep* H2506, that is, their inheritance,

Psa. 73:26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my **portion** for ever.

Psa 16:5 The LORD is the portion of mine **inheritance** and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

The relation is implicit in the relation that makes YHWH the God of his people,

Jer 31:33 but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and **will be their God**, and they shall be my people.

If someone does not “have the Father,” he is not among those whom God owns as his people.

23b (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.—The last clause of v. 23 is not in most of the MT, though it is widely enough distributed that the KJV translators knew it and included it in italics. If genuine, it introduces the second panel of the chiasm with a neat contrast to the end of the first.

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.—The attitude of the true believers is signaled by the verb “abide” (μένω *menō* G3306). While many of its occurrences describe our abiding in Christ, here the emphasis is that the true doctrine abides in them. And in fact the two relations are intimately connected:

If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain [abide] in you, ye also shall continue [abide] in the Son, and in the Father.—When our Lord first introduced the concept of abiding in John 17, he made clear that abiding in him involved having his words abide in us:

Jhn 15:7 If ye abide in me, and **my words abide in you**, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

When we considered the fourth level of the chiasm, dealing with deception, we saw the need to focus on God’s word, which is truth, and here John makes that priority explicit.

²⁷ Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3.11.1) claims that John wrote his gospel, which emphasizes the deity of the Lord Jesus, specifically to answer the false teaching of Cerinthus.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.—Abiding in the true teaching is how we gain eternal life. John’s gospel abounds with statements by the Lord Jesus promising eternal life to those who believe on him: Jhn 3:14-15; 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40; 6:47; 8:51; 10:28; 17:2. In particular, he associates reception of this life with belief in his teaching:

Jhn 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that heareth my word**, and **believeth** on him that sent me, **hath everlasting life**, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

So once again the epistle is reinforcing the principles set forth by the Lord Jesus during his earthly teaching, as recorded in the fourth gospel.

This concludes the first panel of the body of the book, moving us through the three signs of eternal life: righteousness, love, and belief. The second panel, 2:29-4:6, reinforces these signs in the same order.

Notes

Describing Structural Patterns

I have begun to use the vocabulary I introduced in my dissertation to describe chiasms and alternations.

A set of repeated items is called a *panel*. A chiasm thus consists of two panels; an alternation can have any number. The main body of 1 John is an alternation of three panels.

The dissertation called the individual items that are repeated *correspondents*, or *elements* that *correspond*. I may also use *correspondence* to speak of a feature that is repeated across multiple panels. In the third panel, the correspondents are mixed with each other, but all three are present.

Marks of the Sections

The repetition of the tests is seen in superimposed plots of words reflecting the three themes:

- For righteousness, “commandment” ἐντολή *entolē* G1785, “sin” ἁμαρτία *hamartia* G266, ἁμαρτάνω *hamartanō* G264, “righteous” δίκαιος *dikaios* G1342, “justify” δικαίωω *dikaiōō* G1344,
 - For belief, “believe” πιστεύω *pisteuō* G4100 and the names “Jesus” and “Christ,”
 - and “love” ἀγάπη *agapē* G26 (Figure 12).²⁸
- Compare the ordering in Table 1.

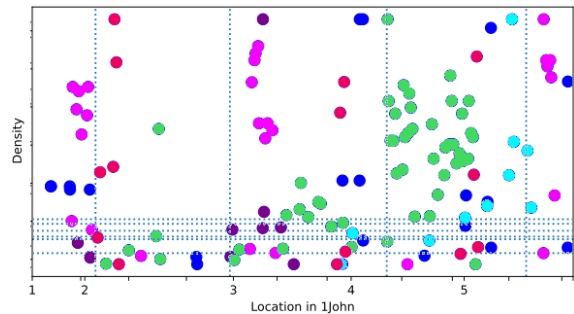


Figure 12: Jesus/Christ (blue), believe (light blue), commandment (red), sin (lavender), righteous(ness) (purple), love (green) in 1 John

Verbs for “Obey” in Greek

“Obey” in the AV NT always represents either a derivative of ἀκούω G191 (ὑπακούω G5219, ὑπακοή G5218) or πείθω G3982 or a derivative (πειθαρχέω G3980, ἀπειθέω G544). John does not use any of these in the sense of “obey.”

Louw-Nida §36.12-30 has an extensive list of words in this semantic space.

Bengal on John 17:12 distinguishes “ἐτήρουν, I was keeping, I kept the whole time, viz. by My power: ἐφύλαξα, I guarded, viz. by My watchfulness”

Table 7 shows LXX correspondences. In LXX, φυλάσσω is much more common than τηρέω, but in the NT, the opposite is the case: τηρέω 75x, φυλάσσω 30x.

The common complement of τηρέω is the command; of ὑπακούω, the one commanding.

	תמַשׁ	נצַר		Total
φυλάσσω	363	9		457
τηρέω	9	7		37
ἐξαιρέω	0	3		140
ἐξερευνάω	0	5		22
ἐκζητέω	0	10		131
Total	469	62		

Table 7: Hebrew correlates of τηρέω and φυλάσσω

²⁸ The vertical density scales for the various words are not aligned in this figure.

Ps 119 uses נצר of God's commandments 10 times, and שמר in the same context 21 times; one verse (34) has both terms.

Other Hebrew words translated τηρέω: שמע צפן רצה (each 1x), נטר (2x). The word means to treasure up, keep, protect, like keeping a vineyard (Song 8:11, 12). It is used of Saul's failure to keep God's words in 1 Sam 15:11. It is common in Proverbs of how wisdom will keep the wise son.

From Table 7, to a reader of the LXX, τηρέω would be more closely associated with נצר, and thus drawn into association with verbs like ἐξέβην (6x in Ps 119) and ἐκζητέω (1x), whose emphasis is paying attention and seeking out, rather than simply obeying.

“Obey” in MT is regularly שמע H8085, corresponding with ὑπακούω. It overwhelmingly governs the one commanding (typically “voice of the Lord”), but occasionally the command Dt 11:27, 28; Jdg 2:17; Jer 35:14, 18 or word 2 Chr 11:4; Jer 11:3; Hag 1:12. A common idiom is hear (i.e., obey) the voice of the Lord and do his commandments.

LXX instances of τηρέω governing word, commandment, etc:

1Sam. 15:11 It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not **performed my commandments** אֶת־דְּבָרַי לֹא הִקִּימָם. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

Prov. 3:1 My son, forget not my law; but **let thine heart keep my commandments** מִצְוֹתַי יִצְרֶךָ לִבְךָ:

Prov. 15:32 He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that **heareth reproof** תוֹכַחַת שׁוֹמֵעַ תוֹכַחַת getteth understanding. *Interesting—expect* ὑπακούω

Notably, we are to keep wisdom

Prov. 3:21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: **keep sound wisdom and discretion:** נִצְרֵה תְּשׁוּבָה וּמְזִמָּה:

Our Love for God

2:5 teaches that the first sign, keeping God's word, is evidence that we truly love him. Later, it will be confirmed by the second sign, loving the brethren:

1Jn 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, **how dwelleth the love of God in him?**

In fact, by including our attitude toward the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life in his discussion of the second sign (2:16), John takes us back to the Shema (Deut 6:5) and its command that all of our love be devoted to God.²⁹

These two links between the first two signs and the love of God suggest that the love of God is the meta-sign, the overarching evidence of eternal life. If this is true, John should link his third sign, belief that Jesus is the Son of God, to that love as well. The theme of belief permeates the third cycle, and the complex of ideas in 4:10-19 integrates God's sending his Son (the object of our belief) with his love for us, which stimulates our love for him (4:19 MT).

29 For full discussion, see my paper on the three choices, <https://cyber-chapel.org/DoctrinalStudies/ThreeChoices/ThreeChoices.pdf>

ἐν αὐτός

What is the relation between this expression and the abiding language in John 15? See separate spreadsheet for exhaustive survey of ἐν in 1 John.

Instances of the believer being in Christ without the verb “abiding” are restricted to 2:5c, and 5:20 (*bis*). The other 12 instances all use μένω.

Christ compares our being “in” him with his being “in” the Father:

Jhn 14:20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. [no verb]

Is Christ ever said to abide in the Father? This verse seems to equate being in and abiding in:

John 14:10 Believest thou not that I am εἰμι in the Father, and **the Father in me**? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but **the Father that dwelleth μένω in me**, he doeth the works.

TDNT:

Thus God abides in Christ, 14:10. Believers abide in Christ (6:56; 15:4–7; 1 Jn. 2:6, 27 f.; 3:6, 24) and Christ in them (Jn. 15:4–7; 1 Jn. 3:24). God abides in believers (1 Jn. 4:16), and believers in God (1 Jn. 2:24; 4:16).³⁰

The “in Christ” idiom appears to be restricted to Paul and John. On my hypothesis (that John wrote his gospel knowing both Paul and the synoptics, to show that Paul’s teaching is grounded in the Lord’s earthly teaching even though some details of his doctrine are not in the synoptics), John preserves these sayings to validate Paul’s use of them. Paul never uses μένω of our relation with Christ, but he speaks extensively of our *being* “in Christ.” μένω would emphasize that the “in Christ” relation is not just a static state, but a deliberate, conscious choice. The Lord commands it in John 15:4, 9. (In particular, it cannot be imparted without the subject’s consciousness, e.g., by sacramental actions such as infant baptism.)

Conclusion: 2:5 is talking about the same relation as 2:6, but John wants to emphasize the deliberateness and consciousness of the relation.

Vocatives in John

How do these function? Do they mark new sections (as often in Paul), or do they highlight a brief intrusion or parenthetical comment in a longer section?

The listing below shows that most vocatives are structurally significant. Those that are not are all either in the introduction (2:1), or the second panel.

Structural Breaks

2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. —Marks the start of the first love section. (But note Alford’s discussion on the links of this commandment with 2:6, which would give it the flavor of an interjection.)

³⁰ Hauck, F. (1964–). μένω, ἐμ-, παρα-, περι-, προσμένω, μονή, ὑπομένω, ὑπομονή. In G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 576). Eerdmans.

2:12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. 13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. 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. —Used to set up the alternation, and set it off from the two discussions of love on either side.

2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. —Introduces the first belief section

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. —The end of the first belief section, forming an inclusion with 2:18

3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. — This and 3:7 divide the second righteousness section into three parts, focusing on the Father, the Lord Jesus, and Satan.

3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.—See note on 3:2.

4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. —This should probably be the start of the belief section in the second cycle.

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. —Subsection break within belief section, from characterizing the false prophets to describing the response of the true believers

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. —Start of third cycle

4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. —Paragraph break within the section

5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. —Sets off final exhortation

Intrusions

We will look more closely at these as we go through second panel to see if in fact some of them mark a break.

2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: —A clear interjection, given the continuation of the alternation in 2:1b-2, in parallel with 1:7, 9.

3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. —Digression commenting on Cain's murder of Abel

3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. —Exhortation emphasizing 3:17

3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. — Counterbalance to 3:20 “if our heart condemn us.”

Verbs for Forgiveness (2:12)

Table 8 shows the LXX/MT alignment on verbs for forgiveness. John’s word (ἀφίημι, 1:9; 2:12) is prominent. When the LXX use of this verb aligns with KJV “forgiv*”, the Hebrew is always either נשׁא or סלח.

Table 9 shows the various Greek words used to translate נשׁא in the sense of “forgive.”

	נשׁא	סלח	Total
ἀφίημι	10	14	125
ἀνίημι	6	0	43
ἀφαιρέω	5	1	165
αἴρω	173	0	280
ἴλεως, ἰλάσκομαι	1	23	47
χαρίζομαι	0	0	12
*δέχομαι	5	0	195
Total	659	47	

Table 8: Hebrew-Greek Correspondences for "forgive"

Verse	Hebrew	Greek
Gen. 50:17a Forgive , I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil:	שׁא נא פֶּשַׁע אֶחָיִךְ וְחַטָּאתָם	ἀφίημι
Gen 50:17b and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.	שׁא נא לְפָשַׁע	δέχομαι
Ex. 10:17 Now therefore forgive , I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only.	שׁא נא חַטָּאתַי	προσδέχομαι
Ex. 32:32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-- ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.	תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם	ἀφίημι
Ex. 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ,	נִשְׂא עוֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחַטְּאָה	ἀφαιρέω
Num. 14:18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression ,	נִשְׂא עוֹן וּפְשַׁע	ἀφαιρέω
Num. 14:19 Pardon סלח ἀφίημι I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.	נִשְׂאֲתָה לְעַם הַזֶּה	ἴλεως
Josh. 24:19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins .	לֹא-יִשָּׂא לְפָשַׁעְכֶם וּלְחַטְאוֹתֵיכֶם	ἀνίημι
1Sam. 25:28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid:	שׁא נא לְפָשַׁע	αἴρω
Is. 2:9 And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.	אַל-תִּשָּׂא לָהֶם:	ἀνίημι
Is. 33:24 And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity .	נִשְׂא עוֹן	ἀφίημι
Psa. 25:18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all	וְנִשְׂא לְכָל-חַטְאוֹתַי	ἀφίημι

Verse	Hebrew	Greek
my sins.		
Psa. 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven , whose sin is covered.	נְשַׁחֵם פְּשָׁע	ἀφίημι
Psa. 85:2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.	נְשַׁחֵם עֲוֹן	ἀφίημι

Table 9: LXX correspondents of נשח in the sense of “forgive.”

Θεός in 1 John

The noun θεός *theos* G2316 appears more densely in 1 John than in any other NT book (63x, 29.29/thousand words). But it is not evenly distributed (Figure 14), appearing only four times in the intro and first panel, and mostly in the final panel. Contrast named references to Father, Spirit, and Son (Figure 13), which appear throughout the book, though preferentially in each of the three main sections. Most of the instances (37) are genitives, 13 are nominative, 10 accusative, and three (4:15, 16 dwell in God; 5:10 believe in God) are dative.

Inventory the nouns that govern θεός as a genitive:

Sons, Children of God, born of God 13x

3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bes **sons of God**: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

3:2 Beloved, now are we the **sons of God**, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

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**.

3:10 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.

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.

4:6 **We are of God**: he that knoweth God heareth us; **he that is not of God** heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is **born of God**, and knoweth God.

5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is **born of God**: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

5:2 By this we know that we love the **children of God**, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

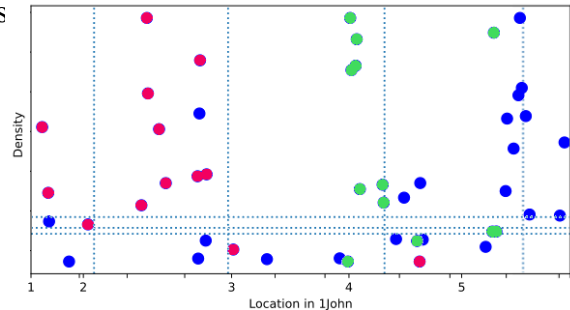


Figure 13: Father (red), Son (blue), and Spirit (green) in 1 John

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

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.

5:19 And we know that **we are of God**, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

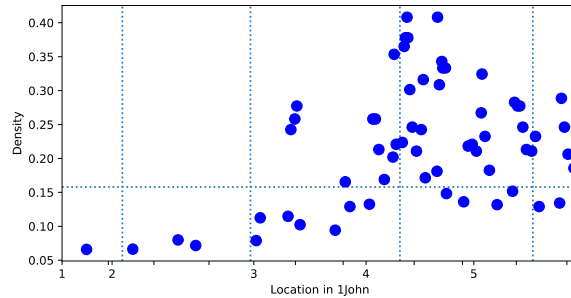


Figure 14: θεός in 1 John

Son of God (Lord Jesus) 9x

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.

4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the **Son of God**, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the **Son of God**?

5:10 He that believeth on the **Son of God** hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the **Son of God** hath not life.

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**.

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. *The reflexive pronoun is Majority, and also very old, Sinaiticus and a corrector to Alexandrinus, but the shift in verb tense suggests that the reference is still Son of God, who is keeping his body, now made up of those who have been begotten of God. Here at the end of the book, this realization of the “in Christ” relation is entirely appropriate.*

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.

Love of God 5x

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

3:17 But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the **love of God** in him?

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for **love is of God**; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

4:9 In this was manifested the **love of God** toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

5:3 For this is the **love of God**, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Word of God, Will of God, Witness of God 3x

2:14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. 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.

2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the **will of God** abideth for ever.

5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the **witness of God** is greater: for this is the **witness of God** which he hath testified of his Son.

Spirits from God 3x

4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the **spirits** whether they are **of God**: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

4:2 Hereby know ye the **Spirit of God**: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is **of God**:

4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not **of God**: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Analysis of 2:18-18

We can discern a chiasm here. (Previous chiastic analyses: <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2015/03/09/1-john-218-29/>. There is a commentary somewhere in Logos that mentions several others, but I can't lay my hands on it now.)

The Last Time (2:18)

This is the only verse in the Greek Bible to describe “the last hour” (ὥρα *hōra* G5610), but other time periods are used elsewhere,

“day” or “days” (ἡμέρα *hēmera* G2250) (about 33x in the OT, usually in the form ἔσχατος τῶν ἡμερῶν; about 11x in the NT, usually the singular ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα.

“Time” is used in this sense only in the NT, using both Greek words for time. Vine under “Season”: “Broadly speaking, *chronos* [χρόνος G5550] expresses the duration of a period, *kairos* stresses it as marked by certain features.” Trench §lvii recognizes a semantic inclusion: “Χρόνος, it will thus appear, embraces all possible καιροί, and, being the larger, more inclusive term, may be often used where καιρός would have been equally suitable, though not the converse.”

χρόνος (*chronos* G5550):

- Jude 18 warns of mockers ἐν ἐσχάτῳ χρόνῳ
- 1 Pet 1:20 uses χρόνος (*chronos* G5550) as the OT does ἡμέρα: “Christ was manifest ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν χρόνων for you.”

1 Pet 1:5 speaks of our salvation to be revealed ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ.

John’s use of ὥρα instead of the more common ἡμέρα may reflect a sense of urgency. “You have heard about the last days, but this is in fact the last hour.”

“Know” in 2:20

“Know” here is not γινώσκω *ginōskō* G1097, the verb that describes our relation to the Lord throughout the book and in John 17:13, but οἶδα *oida* G1492. Abbott-Smith: “γ[ινώσκω], to know by observation and experience is thus prop[erly] disting[uihed] from οἶδα, to know by reflection (a mental process, based on intuition or information).” But this distinction appears not to be dominant in John; cf. John 10:40, “his sheep ... know his voice,” which clearly refers to recognition based on experience. Also Acts 3:16 “this man ... whom ye see and know.” 1 John uses γινώσκω ὅτι 8x, οἶδα ὅτι 9x, γινώσκω 25x, οἶδα 15x. They often convey very similar meanings. Thus the assurance of salvation can be expressed by οἶδα ...

1John 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.

1John 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.

... as well as by γινώσκω:

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

Recall our census of the two verbs in the introduction (Figure 15).

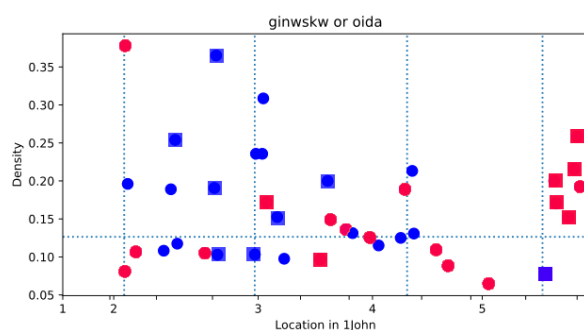


Figure 15: *ginōskō* (circle) vs. *oida* (square); first person plural (red) vs. others (blue)