

1 JN. 4:1 – 5:21

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VIII. 4:1-6 – A threat to faith: the need to test the spirits

A. Test the spirits (v. 1) – *¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits [to see] if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

1. John's opponents, the secessionists, also claimed to have the Spirit of God and to speak in his name. Indeed, they saw themselves as more spiritual or enlightened than the faithful Christians. They were vessel or oracles of divine truth.

2. John commands his readers not to be gullible, not to believe that everyone who claims to be representing God, to be speaking on his behalf, actually is doing so. On the contrary, he says that many false prophets have gone out into the world. John may be speaking generally, but if so, I think there at least is a secondary allusion to the false teachers who had gone out "into the world," into the enemy camp, from within the faithful church.

(a) John speaks of their not believing and testing "spirits" rather than not believing and testing the false prophets because demonic powers ultimately are behind the false prophets. What they are selling has its origin in evil spirit(s), those opposed to God. As Paul says in 1 Tim. 4:1, *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will abandon the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*. And he says famously in Eph. 6:12 that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. We are not told the mechanics of how spirits use people as their spokesmen, but they somehow are able to inject their ideas into the human stream.

(b) There are, of course, several warnings in the N. T. about false prophets operating in and around the Christian community. In Mat. 7:15 Jesus describes false prophets as wolves in sheep's clothing. They appear innocent and to be part of the group, but the reality is that they are ferocious wolves seeking the death of the sheep. Peter tells his readers in 2 Pet. 2:1 that there will be false teachers among them who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.

(c) There is a spiritual war going on, and a large weapon in the enemy's arsenal is false doctrine. That is why Paul told Titus in Tit. 1:9 that an elder "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (ESV).

(d) Of course, not all erroneous teaching is heresy that threatens one's spiritual life. That doesn't mean that some doctrinal errors are trivial or insignificant; no aspect of

God's revealed truth or will is insignificant. It means that some things are more central or fundamental than other things. As we grope together for the whole counsel of God, errors about central or fundamental things – true heresies – must be dealt with decisively.

3. Rather than gullibly believing the false teachers who claim to speak from God, John commands his readers to test their representations. This is similar to Paul's command in 1 Thess. 5:19-21. In the following verses, John gives them a testing criterion for their situation.

B. Criterion of testing (v. 2-3) – ²*In this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God. Indeed, this is the [spirit] of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming and now already is in the world.*

1. The acid test relevant to their situation is whether the teacher or prophet confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The one who does not confess the true incarnation of the eternal Christ (confessing "Jesus" is here a shorthand for confessing "Jesus Christ having come in the flesh"), i.e., the false teachers, is speaking by the spirit of the antichrist, all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

2. John refers to "every *spirit*" that confesses or does not confess because in making or refusing to make that confession we are acting under the influence of the divine Spirit or the spirit of antichrist (the diabolical spirit). Kruse writes (p. 148):

In 2:18ff. the secessionists were identified as antichrists who had already gone out into the world. Here in 4:3 the secessionists are said to be activated by 'the spirit of the antichrist', of whose coming the readers had already heard (as part of common early Christian teaching to which the author has already referred in 2:18). The spirit of antichrist, the author says, is 'even now in the world', and active in people like the secessionists who are now part of 'the world', that is, those people who are motivated by those desires which are not of God (cf. 2:15-17). The aim of the antichrist is to deceive people by denying the truth about Jesus Christ, and in particular, within the context of 1 John, by denying the true humanity of Christ (that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh). As Strecker notes, evil reveals itself in false teaching.

3. Note that in 1 Cor. 12:1-3 Paul dichotomizes the world into opponents (Jesus be cursed) and disciples (Jesus is Lord) to make the point that the presence of the Spirit in one's life is a function of one's relationship with Christ. Those who denounce Christ do not speak by (i.e., do not have) the Spirit; those who confess Jesus' lordship speak by (i.e., do have) the Spirit.

4. Again, this test cannot be divorced from its context. John is speaking into a specific situation and assumes certain things.

C. Overcame the false teachers (v 4) – ⁴*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because the one in you is greater than the one in the world.*

1. John reassures his readers, as those who confess Jesus as having come in the flesh, that they are of God.

2. He reminds them that they have overcome or conquered the false teachers, which is probably a reference to the fact they had resisted the temptation to swallow the false doctrine. They were able to gain this victory because the one in them (God, 2:5-6, 3:24, 4:12, 15) is more powerful than the one in the world (Satan, the inspiring force of the antichrists). Though they had a role to play in the victory (e.g., John warns them not to be taken in by the false teachers in 2:24 and 2 Jn. 7-11), it ultimately was won by the power of God in their lives. To him be the glory!

D. False teachers are of the world (v 5) – ⁵*They are of the world. Therefore, they speak of the world and the world listens to them.*

1. The false teachers have cast their lot with the world; they belong to the enemy camp. As a result, they speak from that camp's perspective (rather than from God's) and have a following within that camp.

2. I think John is discounting the significance of the fact the false teachers had achieved a following by pointing out that gaining adherents is not necessarily proof that one's message is approved by God; it may only be a sign that the message is palatable to the world.

E. We are of God (v. 6) – ⁶*We are of God. The one who knows God listens to us; [the one] who is not of God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.*

1. In contrast to the false teachers, John and his readers are of God. Those in fellowship with God continue to heed the true teaching about Christ. They remain with John's community, the faithful church.

2. Those who join up with the heretics, who heed the heretics' words rather than John's, reveal that they are not, if they ever were, animated by or under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit (the spirit of truth). Rather, they are animated by the evil spirit (the spirit of falsehood). As he indicated in 2:19, the act of leaving the faithful church demonstrates that one is not at that time (if one ever was) part of it.

3. That doesn't mean the faithful are immune to all harmful effects of the false teaching. Otherwise, John would have no need to warn them not to be deceived etc. It means that one who goes over to the secessionists is not at that time a true believer. Whether he previously had been a true believer who was pulled from the faith by the corrupting effect of the heresy and/or other things is not addressed.

IX. 4:7-12 – Further discussion on loving one another

A. Importance of loving one another (4:7-8) – ⁷*Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

1. John urges them to love one another on the basis that love is of (or from) God as they are of (or from) God (v. 6). It is natural and fitting that those born of God reflect the qualities he radiates as a child reflects the qualities of his or her father.

2. Indeed, that nexus is so powerful that the presence or absence of love provides a basis for distinguishing the children of God from those who do not know God. Those who love have been born of God and know God; those who do not love have not known God (see, 3:11-20).

3. Again, John's seemingly absolute statement ("*everyone* who loves") cannot be ripped from its context to mean that the loving non-Christian is in fellowship with God. The necessity of faith in Christ is made clear elsewhere in the letter. John is contrasting two groups of purported believers: his readers whose claim of faith is accompanied by love for the faithful and the secessionists whose claim of faith is not accompanied by that love.

4. And remember that love includes the set of duties to one's fellow man that the one who claims a relationship with God must take seriously.

B. Definition of love (4:9-10) – ⁹*In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

1. God manifested or revealed to us *the nature* of his love by sending his only Son into the world in order that we might live through him. This is where love finds its true definition, not in our love for God, but in his love for us revealed in the sending of his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Love involves action; it sacrifices to bless its object.

2. That John's focus is on the revelation of the *nature* of God's love rather than simply the fact of God's love is supported by parallel with 3:11-18 (esp. 3:16), by the use of "manifested" in 4:9, and by "this way" in 4:11.

3. The older translations rendered the Greek word *monogenēs* in 4:9 as "only begotten," but it is correctly translated in the newer versions as "one and only" or "only." As Gary Burge notes (p. 187, n. 7), "The suggestion 'only begotten' understands the latter half of the word as derived from the Greek verb *gennaō* ('to give birth'). This is incorrect. Rather, the word would derive from *genos*, meaning 'type' or 'kind.'" See BDAG, 658.

C. Exhortation to love one another (4:11-12) – ¹¹*Beloved, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and the love of him is perfected in us.*

1. Since God loved us in this way, we also (in the same way) must love the brothers and sisters. If we are of God, how can we treat them differently than God has treated them?

2. Though God is invisible, believers who love one another reveal that God is living in them. That love is fruit of his abiding. Therefore, the fact this love was a reality in their lives (2:8) should reassure them that they really do know God, despite what the secessionists may claim.

3. John says that if they love one another, God abides in them and "the love of him" is perfected or completed in them. As in 2:5, this could mean God's love for us or our love for God.

a. In this instance, I (slightly) favor a subjective sense of the genitive ("of him") – *his* love for us is perfected. God's love for us reaches its intended effect when it reverberates horizontally in the body of Christ. I think Georg Strecker is on the right track (p. 157):

The love of the brothers and sisters that is now and is to be practiced in the future by the Christian community is the love demanded by God, the love that is in accordance with God's nature. The author wishes to say that in the love of the sisters and brothers achieved by human beings, God's *agapē* reaches its goal. It is not because human love is superior to divine love . . . but because the love of God for human beings intends, by its very nature, to actualize itself in the Christian community in the form of mutual love of human beings for one another.

b. If it means our love for God, he is saying essentially what he said in 2:5. An obedient love for God is a mature or complete love for him, and a key part of that obedience is loving one another.

X. 4:13-18 – Reassurance from having the Spirit, confessing the truth, and loving

A. The manifested Spirit as assurance of reciprocal indwelling (4:13) – ¹³*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

1. If "by this" has a backward reference, then he is saying that the reason their loving one another lets them know they abide in God and he in them is because it confirms that God has given them (a share in) his Spirit (who fills the whole church). This love is fruit of his Spirit.

2. If "by this" has a forward reference, then he is saying that they know they abide in God and he in them because God has given them his Spirit. But even in that case, I think their knowledge of the Spirit's presence is based at least in part on the Spirit's fruit in their lives (see 3:24, 4:2, 4:12, 4:15, 4:16b). The false teachers' claim to have the Spirit is shown to be false by their lack of love for the brothers and sisters and their rejection of the truth about Christ.

B. Reassurance from correct confession (4:14-16a) – ¹⁴*And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son [as] Savior of the world.* ¹⁵*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God,*

God abides in him and he in God. ¹⁶And we have known and have believed the love which God has in us.

1. John and others were eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and they testify about that coming and its purpose – that God the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world. In these few words, we see the Father's love in sending the Son, which love we are to reflect; we see that Jesus was sent from heaven, is the Son of God incarnate; and we see that he came to save us from our sin, which means we must forsake them.

2. In light of this apostolic testimony, John in v. 15 brings assurance to his readers by stating: Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. One wonders why John speaks here of confessing that Jesus is the Son of God rather than repeating what he just said about God sending his Son to be the savior of the world. I think Kruse is probably correct in stating (p. 165):

It is puzzling why the author does not stay with the content of the testimony as he stated it in the previous verse. . . . The reason probably is that the full orthodox confession to be maintained in face of the secessionist denials was the Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh as Savior of the world and gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. However, the author did not need to state this fully every time he alluded to the secessionists' teaching. He could call his readers' attention to all that the secessionists denied, and to all that his readers should affirm, by referring to but one aspect of it, as he does in verses 14 and 15. What the author affirms in verse 15 is that those who do acknowledge Jesus in this way are those in whom God lives and who live in God.

3. The apostles and all who accept their testimony, meaning the church at large and John's readers specifically, have known and believe the love that God has for them.

a. That is inherent in accepting the gospel, which is the ultimate revelation of God's love for us.

b. Given the preposition John uses in v. 16 (*en*), which normally means "in" rather than "for," there may be a subtlety to John's statement. Smalley writes (p. 255): "John may be referring not only to God's love shown to us in the life and death of Jesus, but also to that experience of God's love in the life of the Church and the lives of believers which is created by the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5)."

C. Reassurance from loving one another (4:16b-18) – *God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* ¹⁷*In this love has been perfected among us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because just as he is, so are we in this world.* ¹⁸*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has [to do with] punishment, and the one who fears has not been perfected in love.*

1. Because God is loving by nature, as shown preeminently in his saving action on behalf of mankind, John assures his readers that the one who abides in love abides in God and God in him. Kruse states (p. 166), "They, unlike the secessionists, do love each other, and the author wants them to recognize that this is evidence that God does live in them and they in God, despite the assertions of the secessionists to the contrary."

2. He says that "in this," meaning in loving one another, God's love has been perfected in the sense of 4:12, in the sense that God's love for us reaches completion or its intended effect when it is expressed horizontally in the body of Christ. The result is that believers who are loving one another may have confidence on the day of judgment because already in this world they are the same as Christ is in the sense that they too are in mutual union and indwelling with God. Brown states, "The author is repeating the reason he gave for confidence when he first spoke about the parousia: 'We are God's children right now' (3:2)." As such, they need have no fear as they face the day of judgment.

3. Within the stream of God's perfect or complete love, love that flows from God to mankind and from mankind back to God and to each other, all fear of judgment has been cast out. The reason is that those who abide in this love are in mutual union and indwelling with God and thus can be confident that there is no condemnation for them (4:17). The one who fears judgment has not been perfected in love in that he has not received this intended blessing of God's love. (Note that "perfected" here refers to the person rather than to the love.) When God's love has had its intended effect on us, when it has "perfected" us in that sense, we eagerly look forward to the Lord's return knowing that the judgment will be our entrance into the final state of glory.

XI. 4:19 - 5:2a – Loving God and one another are inseparable

A. God's initiating love (4:19) – ¹⁹*We love because he first loved us.* The reason John and his readers (the faithful church) love as they do is that God first loved them. Our love was activated by God's love. The priority and initiative are his.

B. Test of true love for God (4:20) – ²⁰*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen.*

1. John declares flatly that anyone who claims to love God while hating, meaning not loving, his brother is lying. That person's claim is contradicted by his life. John no doubt has the false teachers in mind. Though they profess love for God, that claim is shown to be a delusion by the fact they reject any brotherly duty toward the faithful.

2. The connection between loving God and loving fellow believers is explained by the statement in v. 20b. It's a statement arguing from the lesser to the greater. As Kruse expresses it (p. 170): "If people cannot carry out the lesser requirement (to love their fellow believers whom they have seen), they cannot carry out the greater requirement (to love God whom they have not seen)."

C. Commanded by God (4:21) – ²¹*And we have this commandment from him: the one who loves God must also love his brother.* Kruse writes (p. 170):

Here the author picks up a major theme from the Last Supper discourse in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus stresses that his disciples' love for him must express itself in obedience to his command, and that his command is that they should love one another [cites omitted]. The author's purpose in picking up this theme here is to reassure his readers who did love their fellow believers that they really knew God, and to show them that the claims of the secessionists to know him were false.

D. To love God is to love Christians (5:1-2a) – *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the one who fathers also* loves the one fathered of him.* ²*In this we know that we love the children of God when we love God.*

1. John concludes this section on the inseparability of loving God and loving one another by stating two truths that together establish the link. First, he says that those who believe the apostolic gospel, as opposed to the Christologically warped message of the false teachers, have been born of God; they are children of God (3:1).

2. Second, he appeals to a maxim drawn from human experience: "everyone who loves the one who fathers (or begets) also loves the one fathered (or begotten) of him." A person who loves the father also will love the father's child. They go together. A child is so precious to a father and the bond between them is so strong, that love for the father cannot be separated from love for his child. It's the same sentiment behind a statement like, "If somebody's got it in for your kid, they've got it in for you."

3. He says in v. 2a that it is "in this," meaning by this maxim, that we know we love the brothers and sisters when we love God. Given that everyone who loves the parent loves his children, those who love God will love his children, their fellow Christians.

XII. 5:2b-5 – Loving God and obeying him are inseparable

A. We also obey when we love God (5:2b-3a) – *We also do his commandments,* ³*for this is love of God, that we keep his commandments.* It makes more sense to me to start a new sentence with the last clause of v. 2 (but I seem to be alone in thinking so). Not only do we know that we love God's children when we love God (v. 2a), we also obey his commandments when we love him (v. 2b). We do so because keeping his commandments is an essential aspect of loving God. That's

why Jesus could say in Jn. 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Stott comments (p. 176): "[W]hether shown to God or to humans, **agape**, is always practical and active. Love for your brothers and sisters expresses itself 'with actions and in truth', and especially in sacrificial service (3:17-18); love for God in carrying out his commands."

B. Commandments not burdensome (5:3b-4a) – *And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴because everyone having been born of God overcomes the world.* And his commandments are not burdensome (as the false teachers may have claimed or implied) because everyone born of God (John's readers) conquers the world. The new birth produces an empowering new perspective (see 4:4-6). In Stott's words (p. 176), "The spell of the old life has been broken. The fascination of the world has lost its appeal." Obeying God is not a chore; it is an expression of a grateful heart.

C. Faith is the victory (5:4b-5) – *And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. ⁵But* who is the one who overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* John identifies their faith as the means by which they overcame the world, the means of the new birth that produced the victorious new perspective. And then he specifies, by a rhetorical question, the nature of that faith in distinction from the warped faith of the false teachers. It is no wonder that obedience strikes them as a burden.

XIII. 5:6-12 – Testimony concerning the Son of God

A. With water and blood (5:6a) – *⁶This is the one who came with water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and with the blood.*

1. Gary Burge writes (p. 201), "First John 5:6 is perhaps the most perplexing verse in all of the Johannine letters." Raymond Brown (p. 598) describes the verse as "enigmatic," and Colin Kruse calls it (p. 175) "a very difficult text to interpret." That's a clue that one needs to tread lightly here. I've given a lot of thought to what I'm about to tell you, but the same could be said for many who have reached different conclusions.

2. First, notice that I have taken the prepositions in the first (*dia*) and second (*en*) clauses of v. 6a as denoting accompaniment rather than means and thus translated them "with." Both words can have that meaning. See, e.g., BDAG, 224, 328; NIDNTT 3:1182. Thus Kenneth Grayston notes (NCBC, 136) that the first clause of v. 6 means that Jesus Christ came **by or with** water and blood and David Rensberger asks (p. 131), "How did Jesus come 'by' or 'with' these things?"

3. John clearly is taking issue with the false teachers' claim that Jesus came *only* with water *not* with water *and* blood. John agrees that Jesus came with water but he insists, contrary to the heretics, that he came *not only* with water but with water *and* with blood. So however one understands the meaning of coming with water and coming with blood that understanding must fit that framework.

4. I think John is saying that Jesus' effort to rescue mankind, his coming, involved not only the baptism he instituted (water) but also, and centrally, his atoning death (blood).

a. Most scholars recognize that Jesus' coming by or with water refers in some way to baptism. To quote David Rensberger (ANTC, 132), "[I]n a Christian context 'water' must surely refer in some way to baptism." Most, however, believe it refers to Jesus' baptism by John. With Colin Kruse, I consider it more likely that it refers to the baptism Jesus instituted.

(1) The phrase "with water" is used three times in the Gospel of John in reference to John the Baptist's baptizing ministry. Most tellingly, in Jn. 1:31 John reports the statement of John the Baptist that he "came baptizing with water." I don't think it is a stretch to believe the apostle's statement in 1 Jn. 5:6 that Jesus "came with water" was a shortened reference to the same concept, the fact that Jesus came baptizing with water.

(2) John certainly was aware that Jesus instituted a water baptism. He refers to Jesus' baptizing ministry at a number of places in his Gospel (Jn. 3:22-26; 4:1), though Jesus entrusted the actual baptizing of people to his disciples (Jn. 4:2).

(3) The contrast John the Baptist draws between his baptizing with water and Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit (e.g., Jn. 1:26-33) does not negate the fact Jesus instituted a water baptism. John is clear that he did, not to mention Mat. 28:19 and what is said about Christian baptism throughout the rest of the N.T. Jesus now baptizes with the Spirit *in conjunction with* the water baptism he instituted. That is the birth of "water and Spirit" (Jn. 3:5).

(a) As Martinus C. de Boer remarked in a 1988 article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (cited in Kruse, p. 176 n. 203), "unlike the baptism of that other baptizer, John, his baptism 'with water' was also baptism 'with the holy spirit.'"

(b) Kruse states (p. 175-176), "Jesus once baptized with water but now baptizes with the Spirit, and it has been suggested that those in the author's community understood that Jesus now baptized people with the Spirit when they baptized them with water in Jesus' name." I think that suggestion is correct.

(4) Perhaps most importantly, the statement that Jesus came "with blood" clearly refers to his giving his life in sacrifice for the sins of mankind. That is the meaning of "blood" in its only reference in 1 John outside the immediate context (in 1:7). Since his coming "with blood" refers to something Jesus did rather than to something done to him – he laid his life down for us (1 Jn. 3:16; see also, Jn. 10:17-18) – the parallel of his coming "with water" is better understood as something he did (instituted a baptism) rather than something done to him (was baptized by John).

b. We know that at least some second-century Gnostics considered baptism to be very important. John Harris writes in his book *Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 1999) 121:

As far as the meaning of [baptism] goes the gnostics seemed to regard it as a rite of purification or of cleansing in preparation for admission to the *pleroma* [the ultimate realm of the true God]. It also had an element of initiation into the mysteries of *gnosis*. The Valentinians viewed baptism as a redemption rite, and both they and the Sethian gnostics regarded baptism as the assurance of immortality. Through baptism the baptized received the spirit of immortality, and thereby the baptized became a *pneumatic* (spiritual being). This was equivalent to receiving the immortal spirit of Christ.

So it is not unreasonable to think that John's opponents combined a Gnostic-like Christology with an emphasis on the baptism instituted by the Christ.

c. John agrees with the false teachers that Jesus came baptizing and that one's submission to that baptism is a pivotal spiritual event, however they may disagree about the particulars of its significance, but he rejects the notion that the blessings received at baptism can be separated from Christ's death on the cross. They are inextricably linked: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came *not only* with water but with the water *and* with the blood.

(1) As I've argued, the false teachers in some sense denied the incarnation, denied that the eternal Son of God actually became the man Jesus of Nazareth. The eternal Son only *appeared* to be Jesus or only inhabited him *temporarily*. It was only the man Jesus who suffered on the cross, not God in the flesh.

(2) This denial that the eternal Son of God died on the cross as the man Jesus of Nazareth eviscerated the gospel by eliminating the atonement and thus eliminated the blessings associated with baptism. Given their denial of the Son's atoning death, the false teachers' promise of baptismal blessings was a theological fraud.

B. The Spirit testifies (5:6b) – *And the Spirit is the one who testifies, for the Spirit is the truth*. The Spirit is the one who testifies to this truth in and through the apostolic witness, most immediately through John, and what he says can be trusted because he speaks God's truth (see 4:2-3, 6).

C. Three witnesses (5:7-8) – ⁷*For there are three that testify, ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in accord.*

1. In fact, there are three that testify to the truth that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came with water and blood – the Spirit, the water, and the blood – and these three are consistent (as required by the Law).

2. I suspect what John means is that the Spirit testifies to this truth through the message of the apostles that is preached in the church and now repeated by John. The water of baptism and the blood shed on the cross bear silent testimony to the same truth. The fact the false teachers deny the significance of the blood, deny that it was blood of the Christ, does not alter the fact that the blood stands as a witness to the truth. It did in fact flow from the veins of Christ, and no amount of denial can change the truth.

3. If you have a KJV or a NKJV, you will notice that there is additional text at the end of v. 7 and the beginning of v. 8. Here is the additional text highlighted in bold type: [7] For there are three that testify **[in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. [8] And there are three that testify on earth]**: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. It is universally recognized that this was not part of the original text. Kruse comments (p. 180 n. 211):

This longer version, known as the Johannine Comma ('comma' meaning 'sentence'), is preserved in only a few later Greek manuscripts (dating from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries). It is thought that the Johannine Comma found its way into the Greek manuscripts via the Latin manuscripts of the ninth century. The Johannine Comma is found in no early Greek manuscripts and is not found in the Old Latin versions before the seventh century, nor in the Vulgate before the eighth century. It is correctly omitted from all modern translations of the NT.

Rensberger states (p. 131): "Unfortunately, the added words were incorporated into the Greek text commonly printed from the sixteenth century until the rise of modern critical editions (the "Textus Receptus"), and so were also included in the KJV."

D. Superiority of God's testimony (5:9) – ⁹*If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater because this is God's testimony that he has testified concerning his Son. We accept human testimony, but surely God's testimony (via the Spirit) is more compelling because it is God's testimony, testimony he has given about his Son.*

E. Believing in the Son of God (5:10) – ¹⁰*The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made him a liar, for he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning his Son. The person who believes in the Son of God, meaning believes that Jesus was the divine Christ, has this testimony in himself (his heart), the testimony that the Christ died (since no one doubted that Jesus died). Those who do not believe God's testimony about his Son have made him out to be a liar.*

F. The testimony (5:11-12) – ¹¹*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. ¹²The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. The testimony God has given about his Son is that God gave us eternal life in him (through his atoning sacrifice). The one who has the Son of God (meaning accepts the truth that Jesus who died was the Son of God) has life, and the one who does not have the Son does not have life.*

XIV. 5:13-21 – Conclusion

A. Purpose summarized (5:13) – ¹³*I write these things to you, the ones believing in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* John summarizes his purpose for writing, just as he did in Jn. 20:31. He wants his readers to know that, contrary to whatever suggestions the false teachers may have made, they have eternal life. They are not to allow these self-proclaimed "spiritual heavyweights" to rob them of their peace and security.

B. Assurance regarding prayer (5:14-15) – ¹⁴*And this is the confidence which we have before him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* ¹⁵*And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from him.*

1. Being in Christ, being children of God, they can be bold in approaching God and confident that he will favorably hear whatever they ask "according to his will." As noted in the discussion of 3:22, to be effective prayer also must be offered by one living in faithfulness or covenant loyalty; by one praying with proper motives, meaning out of a sincere heart rather than "to be seen by men" (e.g., Mat. 6:5-6); by one praying from a desire to glorify God rather than to indulge our selfishness (Jas. 4:3); by one who forgives others (Mk. 11:25; see also, Mat. 6:12-15); and by one who believes God's promises (Mt. 21:22; Mk. 11:24). See Stott, 153. John here simply assumes that these are part of a Christian's prayer.

2. Since God favorably hears such prayer, they (and we) can be sure they have obtained whatever they ask for.

C. Prayer for a sinning brother (5:16-17) – ¹⁶*If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he will ask and he will give him life, to the ones who sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that you should make a request about that.* ¹⁷*All wrongdoing is sin, yet there is sin not unto death.*

1. In light of the efficacy of prayer according to God's will, John says that if they see a brother (or sister) committing a sin "not unto death" they need to pray to God and God will give that sinner life.

a. It is difficult to know what John meant by his references to a sin "not unto death" and a sin "unto death." Many different interpretations have been offered. This is another of those instances where one must tread lightly.

b. My understanding is that a sin "not unto death" is a sin committed by a faithful Christian, one who is walking in the light and thus is penitent. That sin is forgiven and therefore is not in itself spiritually fatal to the sinner because it does not separate him or her from God. It is "not unto death" in that sense.

c. You say, "Well, if the sin is forgiven, why does God need to give life to the one who commits it?" The fact a sin is forgiven does not mean it can pose no danger to one's spiritual life. As Marshall notes, sin is dangerous "because it is the characteristic of life apart from God." Sinning has the potential for corroding one's faith and ultimately for pulling one from Christ, even beyond the point of no return. Sin is a tool of the devil; it can desensitize one to the will of God. The violation of one's conscience can facilitate its further violation.

d. One who sees a faithful brother or sister committing a sin needs to pray that God will protect that brother or sister's faith from any lingering, corrosive effect so that the sin not become a step on the road to apostasy. God will answer that prayer, the result of which is that the sinning brother or sister will be given resurrection life at Christ's return.

2. John simply notes that there is a sin "unto death" and that he's not saying one should make a request about that.

a. I think the sin "unto death" is a knowing, willful, and final rejection of Christ. It is "unto death" in that the person is beyond repentance; his open-eyed rejection of Christ is proof that his repenting apparatus is nonfunctional. See, e.g., Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; Mk. 3:29; Mat. 12:22-32.

b. God will not give blessed resurrection life to one in that state because he will not give such life to the impenitent. So John does not advocate prayer in that case. Note that he doesn't forbid it; he just doesn't advocate it. That's significant because we often cannot tell whether someone is over that line. If we pray for someone who is in fact over the line, we are not violating John's words. Craig Blomberg writes in *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) 497:

[W]hat John writes is that he is *not saying* that people *should* pray in those situations, rather than *saying* that they should *not* pray. In other words, he is just not discussing the situation of what to do with people who have so hardened their hearts that they will never repent. But since we do not have God's ability to know who may have crossed such a line, we must pray for everyone on the assumption that they may still have a chance!

c. The implication is that some or all of the heretics are in that category. John wants to keep the gap between his readers and the false teachers clear and wide to minimize the false teachers' opportunities to adversely influence his readers. The false teachers were not mere sinners in the faith; they were enemies of the faith who had rejected God's forgiveness in Christ and who were seeking to lure others to their view.

D. Three Christian affirmations, things "we know" (5:18-20) – ¹⁸*We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin [habitually], but the one who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.* ¹⁹*We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one.* ²⁰*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us*

understanding so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life.

1. ¹⁸*We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin [habitually], but the one who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.*

a. Christians, those in relationship with God, do not accept sin (as do the false teachers); they do not practice it as a lifestyle (see 3:6-10).

b. The debate regarding the second clause – but the one who was born of God protects him – is whether the one who was born of God refers to the Christian mentioned in the first clause or to Jesus Christ.

(1) If the former, the meaning is that rather than sinning habitually, the Christian guards himself (against such a temptation), and the evil one does not harm him. In that interpretation, ὁ γεννηθεὶς ("he who was born") is taken as a reference to the Christian rather than to Christ, and αὐτόν is taken as a reflexive ("himself"). See Brown, 619-622. The idea is similar to what James says in Jas. 4:7 – "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The fact Jesus is nowhere else referred to as "the one who was born of God" cuts in favor of this view.

(2) The biggest objection to the understanding that "the one who was born of God" refers to a Christian is the shift in tense between the two clauses. In v. 18a Christians are referred to as those "who *have been* born of God"; in v. 18b the reference is to the one "who *was* born of God." This, coupled with the fact Jesus is portrayed in the Gospel of John as the one who keeps his disciples safe, leads most commentators to understand the clause as a reference to Jesus. The meaning in that case is that Jesus protects the faithful from being overpowered by Satan; he does not harm them. This may well be further assurance to the faithful against the threat posed by the false teachers.

2. ¹⁹*We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one* – John and his readers (the faithful), as well as all Christians, know they are God's children and can thus claim the promises made to those born of God. They also know that there are only two sides to this battle and that all who are not Christians are under the control of the evil one (see, e.g., Eph. 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:26).

3. ²⁰*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life* – Christians know that the Son of God has come in the flesh and has revealed the way to know God. He came from God and taught us the way of salvation, namely, that he, through his redeeming work, is the only path to the Father. Christians, having believed Christ's words, are in the Father in that they are in Christ who *is* the true God and eternal life.

E. Keep yourselves from idols (5:21) – ²¹*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* The false teachers had left the faithful Christians and gone into the world because they had a false notion

about Jesus Christ. Just as Israel was repeatedly warned against leaving the one true God to go after idols and against abandoning God's commandments for the permissive life of the worshippers of the false gods of the surrounding nations, so John speaks of joining these false teachers and accepting their theology as "going after idols" (Brown, 628-29, 641).