

First John structure resolved: Exegetical analysis, Part 2

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Numerous attempts have been suggested regarding the structure of First John. The only nearly unanimous agreement amongst commentators is concerning the prologue (1:1–4) and the conclusion (5:13–21). The lack of unanimity can be frustrating for the majority of those who seek to understand the macrostructure of the First Epistle of John. Consequentially, some commentators have opined that it is impossible to determine a notable structure of First John, and the epistle is thus regarded as a relatively imprecise series of various thoughts that were composed on the basis of mere association. Many exegetes have therefore proposed suggested outlines to aid the understanding of First John as opposed to providing genuine efforts to articulate a discernable structure of the epistle. The final part of this exegetical analysis seeks to demonstrate that exegetes need not succumb to such pessimism because there does appear to be a discernable structure to First John. Providing and stating resolve concerning the First John structure is fundamental for understanding the revealed contents of the epistle.

Exegetical analysis of First John 2:28–5:21

Divisions into two units (Chaine 1927; Feuillet 1965), three units (Dodd 2007; Schnackenburg 1992; Thüsing 1971; Westcott 1892) or multiple units (Houlden 1987) generally characterise structural proposals for the first epistle of John (Brown 1995:116–129, 764). Amongst those commentators who affirm a twofold structure for First John, disagreement exists with regard to whether the first division occurs at the end of John 2 or at 3:11 (Akin 2001:37–48; Brown 1995:118–119; Longacre 1992:273–274; Smalley 1984:30–31; Smith 1991:21–24). Amongst those who affirm a threefold structure for First John, the debate is focused upon whether the first primary division should occur at 2:17, 28 or 29 and whether the second primary division should occur at 4:1 or 4:7 (Schnackenburg 1992:11–15). Amongst those commentators who affirm a multiple-unit division for First John, there is a plethora of arguments for the structural paragraphs (Köstenberger 2009:171–172).

First John 2:28 is best understood as beginning a new section because it allows for the content with which it begins to parallel 2:12 and 2:18. The construction $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma\ \acute{\omicron}$ [everyone], with a subsequent participle, occurs in seven clauses from 2:29 to 3:10. The section provides the thesis of the unit (similar to 1:5), which according to Talbert (1992):

is given in 2:29: Since he is righteous, everyone who does right is born of him. Doing right is a consequence of and, therefore, a sign of one's spiritual birth. (pp. 28–29)

Three units provide the Christological basis for John's assertion: 3:1–4, 3:5–8a and 3:8b–10. Each unit contains positive and negative corollaries (3:3–4; 3:6–8a; 3:9–10) to prove the thesis of 2:29.

As there is debate with regard to the first primary division, there is also disagreement with regard to whether the section ends at 3:3, 3:10 or 3:12. The best understanding would be to regard the structural paragraph as concluding with 3:10 because 3:9–10 form an *inclusio* with 2:28–29. For instance, 2:29 describes the one who is born of God, as does 3:9. The positive assertion that 'everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him' (2:29) is contrasted with two negative declarations: 'no one who is born of God practices sin' (3:9) and 'anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God' (3:10).

Moreover, many of the themes from 2:28–29 are repeated such as abiding, practicing righteousness and the appearing of the Son in relationship to the manifestation of the children of God. First John 3:1–3 serves as a parenthesis to explain what it means to be the children of God, which was mentioned already in 2:29. First John 3:4 resumes the argument with a contrast to the children of God, who were described in 2:29. In contrast to the one who is practicing righteousness is the one who 'practices sin' (3:6, 9). Of course, believers do still sin (cf. 1:8, 10); however, they do not persist habitually in sin (cf. 2:1; 2:29; 3:4). The one who is 'born of God' cannot persist in habitual sin (3:9). First John 2:29–3:10, therefore, contrasts the child of God with the child of the devil. First John 3:1,

in particular, reminds John's readers that God's great love has bestowed upon them the gift of being called his children. The persistent contrast between those who are called the children of God is righteousness (3:7, 10) as opposed to sin (3:4, 5, 6, 8, 9).

The next structural paragraph begins in 3:11 with the assertion *ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία* [for this is the message], which is parallel to the assertion in 1:5. The parallel assertion demonstrates that 3:11 is indeed the beginning of the unit. Moreover, the repetition of *ἀγγελία* [message] demonstrates a relationship between 1:5 and 3:11 (Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel 1972:22) and may indicate a second primary unit in First John (Brown 1995:440). The phrase *ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους* [that we should love one another] in 3:11 is comparable to Jesus' command in John 15:12, which is, of course, a restatement of the 'new commandment' given by Jesus in John 13:34–35. The section constituent in 2:3–11 is somewhat of an elaboration upon obedience to God's commandment to demonstrate love toward fellow believers. Dodd (2007) noted this enforcement and illustration of John's thesis (cf. 3:12), namely:

... that right conduct is the only sure and sufficient mark of the child of God. For in a Christian valuation love and hatred are the typical forms of righteousness and sin respectively. (p. 82)

The unit ends with 3:18 and functions as the midpoint of the epistle. However, one could also extend the unit to 3:24, especially since 4:1–6 is one of the few sections within First John where there is almost unanimous agreement amongst the commentators that it is a distinct unit. The similarity between the assertions in 3:11 and 3:23 may indicate that 3:11–24 should be regarded as a single unit. The transitional statement in 3:24 (*καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν*) [We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us] is similar to the summary statement at the end of 3:10 (*καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ*) [nor the one who does not love his brother]. However, in addition to the orienters, *οἶδαμεν* [know] and *οἶδατε* [know], in 3:14–15, the two negative imperatives, *μὴ θαυμάζετε* [do not be surprised] (3:13) and *μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν* [let us not love] (3:18), demonstrate coherence to an unit as designated by verses 11–18. The explanatory examples and summary (3:12, 14, 16, 17, 18) with regard to love also provide 3:11–18 with coherence. Additional themes (to that of love) which characterise 3:11–18 include *κόσμος* [world] (3:13, 17), *μένω* [abide] (3:14, 15, 17) and *ζωὴν* [life] (3:14–15) (Miehle 1981:288).

First John 3:12–17 is an illustration and extended discussion with regard to the truth that 'the one who does not love his brother' is the child 'of the devil'. The example given is that of Cain in 3:12, and the application for the believer is given by means of comparison in 3:13–14. The vocative *ἀδελφοί* [brethren] in 3:13 gives prominence to this application. Although the vocatives, *ἀγαπητοί* [beloved] or *τεκνία* [children], reflect John's customary use, the use of *ἀδελφοί* identifies John and his readers with Abel as opposed to those who hate, who are identified with the murderer Cain (cf. the

dual usage of *ἀνθρωποκτόνος* [murderer] in 3:15). First John 3:18 restates the assertion of 3:11 as a mitigated exhortation based upon the instruction and application given in 3:12–17.

First John 3:11–18 provides additional explanation of the divine command to love fellow believers. The love of Jesus (3:16) and the corresponding love for other believers (3:11, 14, 17) are contrasted with the hatred of those who belong to 'the evil one', of whom Cain is the primary example (3:12–13, 15). The section also contributes to the emphasis upon eternal life in 1:1–4 and 5:13–21. Love is the distinguishing characteristic of the believer, an argument which was also emphasised in 2:3–11, 12–14, 15–17 and 4:7–10, 11–21 (cf. 3:19–24). The love of Jesus and love for other believers demonstrate that one abides in the love of God and, thus, is abiding in eternal love (as opposed to abiding in death, like those who hate). The love that is described in 3:11–18 is the kind that is expressed not only in word but also in deed, that is, helping fellow believers who are 'in need', even to the point of ultimate and particular sacrifice (3:16–17).

With the exception of 3:21, *καί* [and] and *ὅτι* [that] are in the clause-initial position, which would indicate that 3:19–24 is best understood as a separate unit from 3:11–18. First John 3:19–24 is related to 3:11–18 as the consequence of the previous reason (i.e. the initial conjunction *καί* relates 3:19–24 to the previous as also evident from the usage of *τούτῳ* [this]). First John 3:19–24 demonstrates the result of the prior practice, that is, how love for fellow believers is the basis for either confidence or conviction.

First John 3:19–24 is the first indication of a potential chiasmic structure to the First Epistle of John (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:70). For instance, the emphasis upon having 'confidence before God' (3:21) is comparable to 2:28–3:10 where emphasis is given to the relationship between 'confidence' and 'righteousness'. The condemnation of the conscience (3:20) or the freedom of the conscience (3:21) is a prominent aspect of this section (Miehle 1981:289). The contrast between either condemnation or freedom of conscience develops this section. John's statement in verse 19 was given to reinforce:

... the exhortation to his readers not to close their hearts toward their fellow believers in need: they will know they belong to the truth when their love finds practical expression in helping those in need. So that they may know that they belong to the truth, the readers must 'persuade their hearts in the presence of God' ..., so that they do not succumb to the meanness in their hearts and refuse to offer material assistance. This persuasion is to be undertaken ... whenever their hearts object to legitimate calls upon their generosity when they are in fact in a position to respond. (Kruse 2000:141)

Consequently, verses 19 and 20 form a conditional sentence which should be understood as follows: If believers will assure their hearts before God, their hearts will not have the feeling of condemnation. The second usage of the clause-initial *ὅτι* [that] in 3:20 serves as the reason for the prominence in 3:19, that is, John's readers are to persuade their hearts because God is greater than it, and he knows all things. First John 3:21–24 describes two consequences when the heart

does not condemn the believers. Firstly, there is confidence before God, and secondly, believers may receive whatever they ask from him. The second consequence is emphasised by three propositions: (1) believe in Jesus and love other Christians, (2) obedience is the basis for abiding in God, and (3) confidence is received by the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The concept of righteousness is apparent, albeit stated differently than in 2:29, with emphasis upon whether one's heart does or does not feel condemnation. Verse 22 indicates that having 'confidence before God' allows the believer to ask for needs in accordance with the will of God. The heart will not condemn the one who keeps the divine commandments, especially the command to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to love fellow believers. Whereas righteousness in 2:29 indicated whether one is born of God, it is seen to be evident in 3:19–24 by heeding God's commands, which proves whether one abides in God and whether God remains in the believer. First John 3:9 affirmed that the σπέρμα [seed] of God abides in the believer whereas 3:24 places emphasis upon being possessed τοῦ πνεύματος [of the Spirit] whom God has given to believers.

With the occurrence of πνεύματος [Spirit], the 'tail-head linkage' is apparent between 3:24 and 4:1. The use of the vocative ἀγαπητοί [beloved], with the imperative verbs μὴ πιστεύετε [do not believe] and δοκιμάζετε [test] as subsequent to 3:24, indicate a structural division (Larsen 1991:54).¹ Moreover, the initial ἐν τούτῳ [by this] anticipates the deictic ἐκ τούτου [of this] at the conclusion of the unit (Miehle 1981:291). First John 4:1–6 is easily distinguished from the previous contexts. The context would also indicate a new structural paragraph because the emphasis changes from confidence before God on the basis of one's actions to the confidence as a consequence of the doctrine that one affirms. The emphasis is for the readers 'to believe correctly regarding Jesus Christ' (Longacre 1983:28). Brown (1995:543) understood 4:1–6 as related to the first part of the commandment in 3:23 whereas 4:7–12 is related to the second part of that commandment.² As is customary Johannine usage throughout this Epistle, the author 'finds a transition to a new section in the repetition of the last prominent idea' (Brooke 1912:106).

The relationship between 4:1–6 and 4:7–12 is further demonstrated by the cataphoric ἐν τούτῳ [by this] at the beginning of 4:13. First John 4:13–21 expounds upon aspects that are identified in 4:1–6 and 4:7–12, even though, in the immediate context, ἐν τούτῳ refers to subsequent information. The mutual abiding resumes the prior statements from 4:4 (ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν, He who in you) and 4:12 (ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει, God abides in us), yet it provides a new dynamic, which is that the believer also abides in God (4:13, 15, 16). To know whether one abides in God is based upon confessing 'that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (4:1–6) and expressing love toward fellow believers, which manifests the character of God, who

1. Longacre (1983:28; 1992:275) regarded 4:1–6 as the 'doctrinal peak' of the body of the Epistle.

2. The same aspect of 'tail-head linkage' was evident at the end of 2:27 and the unit at 2:28 (cf. the phrase μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ, abide in him).

TABLE 1: A common confession.

1 John 4:1–6	1 John 2:18–27
many false prophets have gone out into the world (v. 1)	even now many antichrists have appeared (v. 18)
Spirit of God (v. 2)	anointing from the Holy One (v. 20)
confesses . . . Jesus Christ (v. 2)	confesses the Son (v. 23)
antichrist . . . in the world (v. 3)	this is the antichrist (v. 22)
truth (v. 6)	truth (v. 21)
have overcome (v. 4)	promise (v. 25)
spirit of truth (v. 6)	His anointing teaches you (v. 27)

is love (4:7–12). Consequently, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is based upon two essential doctrinal truths: (1) listening to those who speak as from God and (2) living in a manner that proves that God abides within oneself.

The context of 4:1–6 is the contrast between the spirit of error from the world and the spirit of truth from God. The prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ [from God] is prominent throughout this section. The first occurrence of the phrase is located in 4:1 to indicate the necessity to discern the truthfulness of any and all teaching. The phrase is used in every verse of 4:1–6. The prominence structure of this section is evident in the chiasmic structure of the pronouns of 4:4–6, which contrasts the apostolic message with the spirits from the world (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:78):

- A ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστε [You are from God],
 B αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσὶν [they are from the world]
 A' ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμὲν [we are from God]

The parallel to this section is 2:18–27 (see Table 1), which would again indicate a chiasmic structure in the First Epistle of John.³

First John 2:18–27 indicates that 'even now many antichrists have appeared' whereas 4:1–6 indicates that 'many false prophets have gone out into the world'. The units are similar in that God gives the provision for discernment, and confession is an essential aspect for discerning and testing the spirits. Both passages emphasise that one's confession with regard to Jesus Christ is evidence of whether one is from God. John's readers are ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ [from God], thus they listen to his messengers whereas those whose identity is converse (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, from the world) do not listen to God's apostolic messengers (cf. 1:1–4).

The next unit beginning with 4:7 is best understood to conclude at 4:12. Although it is possible to argue for a division between 4:11 and 4:12 because the content changes from loving others as a consequence of God's love to loving others as evidence of God's abiding (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:82), it would be best to understand 4:12 as concluding the command to love others. Moreover, the use of the cataphoric ἐν τούτῳ [by this] at the beginning of 4:13 would better delineate the commencing of a new unit. The expression of love for others cannot be separated from God abiding in the believer. The repetition (15 times) of some form of ἀγάπη [love] in each

3. J. Smit Sibinga (1970:206) asserted that 2:27–28 belong to 2:18–26, based upon a chiasmic structure of those verses. For example, 2:27 reads, 'true and is not a lie,' which is a reverse parallel to verse 21, 'you do not know the truth [i.e. lies] ... you do know it [i.e. the truth]'. Similarly, in 2:24, the Son and the Father was reversed from 'the Father and the Son' in 2:22. The emphasis of the chiasm would then be 2:24.

verse of 4:7–12 (in addition to the predominance of θεός [God]) provides coherence to this unit:

- A love one another (v. 7a)
- B love is from God (v. 7b)
 - C love demonstrates knowing God (v. 8)
 - D God is love and so loved (vv. 9–11a)
- C' love demonstrates the love of God (v. 11b)
- B' love from God not seen (12a)
- A' love one another (12b–c)
- A love one another (v. 7a)
- B love is from God (v. 7b)
 - C God is love (vv. 8–10)
 - B' God so loved (v. 11a)
- A' love one another (v. 12)

The command in 4:7–12 to love fellow believers is not based upon God's commands or evidence of the believer's relationship with God (as in prior sections). The command to love is theological, that is, because God is love. The Johannine theology is that love is based upon the God who is love abiding in the believer, and thus, his love is perfected in them.

The command to love fellow believers is stated in 4:7 as three doctrinal truths: (1) love is from God, (2) love is the consequence of regeneration, and (3) love is the consequence of knowing God. According to 4:8, not to love means one does not know God because love is his nature. The manifestation of God's love is explained in 9–10, beginning with the cataphoric ἐν τούτῳ [by this], which develops the thought progression. John developed his theology for the readers by asserting how it is that God manifests his love, namely by sending his only begotten Son into the world to be the ἰλασμός [propitiation] for sin. John concluded this section by restating the command to love fellow believers, which manifests the nature of God who abides in the believer. The assertion to love one another forms an *inclusio* between 4:7 and 4:12. However, the reason to love in 4:12 is somewhat different than in 4:7; yet the rationale for doing so is more substantive. When believers love one another, it is the manifestation of the nature of the God who has not been seen.

The deictic expressions, ἐν τούτῳ [by this] (4:13, 17) and ταύτην [this] (4:21), are a reference to the subsequent information. Kruse (2000:163) understood 4:13 as 'transitional' because 'it is more closely connected with what follows than with what precedes' (cf. 3:24). There are two ὅτι [that] clauses in 4:13, which are subsequent to the occurrences of ἐν τούτῳ. The first occurrence is in relationship to the verb γινώσκομεν [we know] and indicates the content of the believer's knowledge, namely '... that we abide in Him and He in us'. The second use of the ὅτι clause occurs exegetically to ἐν τούτῳ and therefore explains how believers may know the reality of the mutual abiding, 'because He has given us of His Spirit'.⁴ First John 4:13 asserts that the giving of the indwelling Holy Spirit to the believer is one manner in which God grants confidence of the reality of a relationship with him.

4. Smalley (1984:238) also noted the expression ἐν τούτῳ [by this] as used in relation to what is subsequent. Although he understood the second ὅτι [that] clause as causal ('because'), which is also indicated by the New American Standard, the consequent meaning is not profoundly different from an exegetical understanding.

Kruse (2000) worded it as follows:

What the author is implying in 4:13, then, is that because the Spirit teaches believers about the love of God expressed in the sending of the Son to be the Saviour of the world (4:14), and because they believe that teaching, they may be assured that they dwell in God and God in them. (p. 163)

If the Christian confesses the teaching that is 'from God', particularly with regard to the nature of Jesus Christ, and manifests the nature of God who has not been seen, the consequence is confidence before God on the basis of a mutual abiding. In a previous section (2:5), John told his readers that the love of God is perfected in whoever keeps God's Word. Similarly, in 4:12, the love of God is perfected in those who love one another, and in 4:17, the love of God is perfected in those who abide in God and in those within whom he abides.

The clause-initial καί [and] in 4:14 is best understood in relation to the immediately preceding verse (4:13) (Smalley 1984:239).⁵ First John 4:15–16 develop the concepts of the previous sections with specific application to the believer. First John 4:16 then provides a conclusion and explanation based upon 4:13–15. With the occurrence of the noun ἀγάπη [love], there is a 'tail-head linkage' between the first and second portions of 4:16. The manifestation of the love of God in the believer is to 'have confidence in the day of judgment' (4:17). 'Perfect love casts out fear' whereas 'the one who fears is not perfected in love' (4:18).

The occurrence of ἐν τούτῳ [by this] in 4:17 makes it difficult to determine the referent since there are both ἵνα [so that] and ὅτι [that] clauses subsequent to its usage, and it is not conclusive whether the clauses are related to ἐν τούτῳ. Brooke (1912:123–124) noted two possible interpretations for determining the referent in 4:17, that is, ἐν τούτῳ either refers to what was preceding or what is subsequent.⁶ If the latter, ἐν τούτῳ refers to the clause that ἵνα introduces, with the consequent meaning that love is perfected only by those who can confidently anticipate the future day of judgement. Therefore, one does not 'have confidence in the day of judgment'. The confidence is with regard to the event, that is, confidence with regard to the day (as opposed to ἐν [in] the day). The second interpretation is that ἐν τούτῳ recapitulates the preceding information, which would be the better understanding because then the ἵνα clause would indicate the consequence of perfected love, and the ὅτι clause would indicate the reason for such confidence.⁷

First John 4:19 begins with emphasis upon the love of God, and the thought progression is developed with regard to love for fellow believers. Once love is defined by the nature of God, it is evident that love in the believer must be subsequent to the love of God, that is, the love of God is not only prior

5. Schnackenburg (1992:219), however, regarded 4:14–15 as an evident digression.

6. See also, Schnackenburg (1992:222–23).

7. Smalley (1984:244) understood the referent of ἐν τούτῳ [by this] to occur subsequently, yet did not preclude 'a retrospective reference to v 16 (despite the new paragraph)'. See also, Brown (1995:526–27); Marshall (1978:223); Westcott (1892:157).

to the believer's love of him but also the love of God is the ability to love. Love is next related to obedience (4:20–21), which is a thought developed by the conditional 'if we say'. There are two protases that develop the conditional sentence: (1) people saying they love God and (2) people hating their brother. Brown (1995:533) understood 4:20 as involving 'an artistic chiasm':

- A The one not loving
- B whom he has seen
- B' God whom he has not seen
- A' cannot love

The one who asserts love for God, yet hates a fellow believer, 'is a liar'. The apodoses are based upon twofold reasoning. Firstly, one cannot love God who is not seen whilst hating the believer who can be seen (cf. 4:12). Secondly, love and obedience cannot be separated from each other. Therefore, people are liars if they do not love fellow believers because it is disobedience to the command of God.

The clause-initial *καί* [and] 'tightly connects v. 21 to the preceding verse, upon which it is a commentary'. The *ἵνα* [so that] clause in 4:21 is understood to be exegetical (Brown 1995:534). If the clause introduces the purpose or result of 'this commandment', the *ἐντολήν* [commandment] is not specified. However, if the *ἵνα* clause is exegetical to *ταύτην* [this], the commandment is explained as loving God and loving fellow believers. The structural prominence of 4:13–21 is evident by the application of verses 19–21 and the foundational propositions in 4:13–16 and 4:17–18 (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:88–90).

Miehle (1981:297) noted 'a loose tail-head linkage between 4:21 and 5:1 with the parallelism of the idea of loving one's brother as a sign that one loves God'⁸:

- ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν [one who loves God]
- ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ [should love his brother also]
- πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννησάντα [whoever loves the One]
- ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον [and loves the child born]

First John 5:1–12 may be understood as an extended exposition of 4:1–21, which is evident by the repetition of the two doctrinal truths that prove the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Longacre (1983:36) understood this section as presenting an assertion (5:1) and then articulating the evidence (5:2–12). However, the evidence contains a 'reason paragraph' (5:2) with the reason forming the remainder of the structural paragraph (5:3–12). The structural paragraph of 5:1–12 will be understood similar to Longacre, with some minor revisions, such as 5:2–5 being more propositional and 5:6–12 providing the evidence for those assertions.

Coherence in 1 John 5:1–12 is evident from the following repetitions: belief in Jesus (5:1, 4–5, 10), loving fellow believers (5:1, 2–3) and heeding God's commandments (5:2–3). The section reiterates that those who possess the threefold characteristics of belief, love and obedience are truly 'the children of God' (5:1, 4) and have 'overcome the world' (5:4–5). Moreover, the section gives prominence to the

8. See also Sherman and Tuggy (1994:88).

testimony of God (5:6, 7, 9–11) and its relationship to the granting of eternal life (5:11–12). The unit could be subdivided as 5:1–5 and 5:6–12,⁹ as evident from the 'tail-head linkage' of *ἰησοῦς* [Jesus] in verses 5 and 6. The cataphoric *οὗτός* [this] at the beginning of 5:6, in addition to the continuation of thought from 5:1 to the end of 5:5, and the progression from the one who 'has overcome the world' adds to the evidence of such victory.

First John 5 begins with two equivalent constituents: Those who believe and love are *ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται* [born of God] (Bultmann 1973:76).¹⁰ Verses 2–3 are then exegetical, the conclusion being that love for God is inextricably related to obedience.¹¹ Moreover, love for God's commandments (especially love for fellow believers) 'are not burdensome' because the believer's faith 'has overcome the world' (5:3–4). In reverse parallel, 5:5 reiterates the truth of verse 1: 'whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God' (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:93):

- A whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ (5:1a)
- B is born of God (5:1b)
- C loves the *child* born of Him (5:1c–2a)
- D love and obey (5:2b–3a)
- C' loving the child is not burdensome (5:3b)
- B' whatever is born of God overcomes the world (5:4)
- A' he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5)

First John 5:6–12 provides the evidence for the previous assertions. There are two propositions that provide the foundation for the conclusion of 5:12. The first proposition is that the proof demanded by the Old Testament was satisfied (5:6–8). The second proposition is the testimony that God gave with regard to his Son (5:9–10). Therefore, not to believe in Jesus is to regard God as a liar. Verses 11–12 conclude the unit with the testimony of God: Eternal life 'is in His Son' and whoever 'has the Son has the life'. Contrariwise, the one 'who does not have the Son of God does not have the life'.

The 'tail-head linkage' between 5:12–13 (*ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν* [has the life] in v. 12 and *ζωὴν ἔχετε* [have life] in v. 13) indicates that the first half of 1 John 5 concludes with verse 12.¹² The remainder of the epistle provides an apologetic whereby people may proclaim the truth of God's Word so that one may know whether they have eternal life. First John 5:13–21 is the conclusion and epilogue with 5:21 providing an appropriate exhortation and warning. The conclusion of the first epistle

9. See, for example, Du Rand (1979:26–27). However, Du Rand regarded 5:6–21 as the concluding unit.

10. Marshall (1978:227) understood the statement to be 'surely self-evident that everybody who loves a parent also loves [should it not be loves?] his child'. Other commentators understood the statement with regard to one's own parent, that is, whoever loves one's own father also loves the other children that he has fathered (Brooke 1912:128–29; Haas *et al.* 1972:132–133; Westcott 1892:177). Marshall's deduction appears to be most probable, especially as the statement was introduced with *πᾶς ὁ [whoever]*. However, within context, the application of the statement is certainly true with regard to God. Love for God motivates the believer to have love for fellow believers, that is, the children 'born of Him' (cf. 4:20).

11. In the Old Testament, love is inextricably related to covenant and obedience (Ex 20:6; Dt 7:6–8; 10:12; 11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:19–20; Jos 22:5; 1 Sm 18:1–3; etc.). In the New Testament, love is most frequently related to discipleship and obedience (Jn 14:15, 21, 23–24; 15:9–10; 1 Jn 2:4–6; 5:1–3; 2 Jn 6a; etc.).

12. Smalley (1984:276) understood 5:13 as transitional, 'in that it looks back to the subject matter of vv 5–12 and also provides a summary conclusion to 1 John in its entirety that leads into the closing remarks of vv 14–21' (cf. Dodd 2007:133; Haas *et al.* 1972:145; Schnackenburg 1992:247). Other commentators understood 5:13 in relation to 5:14–21 (e.g. Westcott 1892:188).

of John begins with the author's purpose statement, that is, his purpose for writing was for his readers to 'believe in the name of the Son of God' and to know that they 'have eternal life' (cf. Jn 20:31). The relationship between a true Christology and eternal life is asserted, which was important as a consequence of many antichrists that deviated from the apostolic doctrine and demonstrated that they belong to the lie and remain in darkness. Having asserted that he wrote for his readers to know that they have eternal life, John expounded upon that statement in the subsequent verses.

Several elements demonstrate coherence in 5:13–21. In addition to the 'tail-head linkage' between 5:12 and 5:13, there is the chiasmic structure with regard to the confidence that believers may have in their prayers when asking according to the will of God:

- A ἂν τι αἰτώμεθα [if we ask]
- B ἀκούει ἡμῶν [He hears us]
- B' ἀκούει ἡμῶν [He hears us]
- A' ὃ ἂν αἰτώμεθα [whatever we ask]

First John 5:14 asserts such confidence with 5:15 written exegetically. The sin that either leads to death or not is the sin that illustrates why prayers are to be made in accordance with the will of God. The mention of sin also serves the purpose of providing a warning. The contrasts and parallelism between 5:16 (ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον [sin not toward death]) and 5:17 (ἁμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον [sin not toward death]) and the contrast between 5:20 (ὁ ἄληθινὸς θεός [the true God]) and 5:21 (εἰδώλων [idols]) also demonstrate a coherent unit. Moreover, the orienter οἶδαμεν [we know] (5:15, 18, 19, 20) begins five propositional statements, which is a prominent motif throughout this section to assure believers with regard to the work of God on their behalf (Miehle 1981:301–302; Sherman & Tuggy 1994:101–102). The teaching of 1 John 5:18 was stated previously in 3:9.¹³ The particle ἀλλά [but] is contrastive and provides additional explanation of the phrase οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει [not sin]. First John 5:19 clarifies the previous verse, especially since ὁ πονηρὸς [the evil one] is mentioned for a second time (τῷ πονηρῷ [the evil one]; cf. 2:13–14; 3:12). The final segment of First John contains a concluding reference to eternal life, which is the close of the explanations with regard to this life, and it relates the affirmation from 5:13. The prominence of 5:20 is evident from the propositional assertions: (1) 'the Son of God has come', (2) believers have been given understanding because he came, (3) the Son is ἀληθινός [true] and ζωὴ [life] (cf. Jn 14:6) and (4) being in the Son unites one to the only ἄληθινός θεός [true God]. With the explanation of the Son's first coming and the emphasis upon truth and life, believers are to have their actions affected by not accepting any alternative to belief in the Son of God. First John 5:21 is an appropriate exhortation with regard to the repeated commands to abide in God. The hortatory character of First John is evident in that the apostle not only wrote to provide confidence to his readers but also to make prominent appeals to their actions. Consequently, the final declaration of the epistle is an overt command not to substitute anything for belief in the Lord Jesus Christ (Sherman & Tuggy 1994:102).

13. Malatesta (1978:237–241, 319–320) understood 5:18–20 as explaining and summarising various aspects of 2:29–3:10.

Conclusions for interpretation

When one compares First John to the common 1st-century letter, it is easily discerned that the first Johannine epistle is indeed unique in structure. Nevertheless, the contemporaneous examples of Second John and Third John yield almost all of the distinctive features of the 1st-century epistolary format. The grammar and syntax of First John is uncomplicated, and yet there is a rather evident structure, which even reflects a concentric format. The intent for this exegetical analysis of First John was:

... to respect both the semantic structure of the text, in addition to the manner in which to define certain structural units (such an examination also helps to explain the thematic repetition of First John). Moreover, one may develop an outline that is representative of the primary Johannine emphases. (Bigalke 2013:42)

Based upon exegetical analysis of First John, one may discern that 14 units comprise the structure of First John (1:1–4; 1:5–2:2; 2:3–11; 2:12–14; 2:15–17; 2:18–27; 2:28–3:10; 3:11–18; 3:19–24; 4:1–6; 4:7–12; 4:13–21; 5:1–12; 5:13–21), and these divisions can be conveyed chiasmally (Bigalke 2013:42–43):

- A Prologue: Eternal Life (1:1–4)
- B Three Witnesses (1:5–2:2)
(to deny sin is to make God a liar) (walk)
- C The love of God and the believer (2:3–17)
- D False Christ (2:18–27)
- E Believer's confidence (2:28–3:10)
(do not sin)
- F Love proves abiding (3:11–18)
- E' Believer's confidence (3:19–24)
(do keep God's commands)
- D' False prophets (4:1–6)
- C' The love of God and the believer (4:7–21)
- B' Three Witnesses (5:1–12)
(to deny Jesus is to make God a liar) (testimony)
- A' Epilogue: Eternal Life (5:13–21)

The exegetical analysis of First John will benefit interpreters of this remarkable text in, at least, a fourfold manner. The first aid in interpretation is apparent in the eleven-fold chiasmic outline, which indicates the theological progression of the content and would seem to prove that First John 'was not written as a series of unrelated aspects of doctrine and ethics that tend to spiral in a somewhat disorganised manner' (Bigalke 2013:43). Secondly, the identification of the 14 structural units of First John grants the interpreter a more extensive emphasis upon:

... the manner in which certain motifs and terms appear and then recur throughout the Epistle. Moreover, the observation of the development of the themes throughout First John allow one to identify the progression of thought in addition to the intensification of meaning (cf. 3:11–18). (Bigalke 2013:43)

Thirdly, the interpreter 'is encouraged to consider the extent of similarities and dissimilarities between parallel units. When such an approach is adopted, one may discern the thematic and theological magnificence of First John' (Bigalke 2013:43). Fourthly, the exegetical analysis of First John 'indicates many motifs that are fundamental to the thought progression of the Epistle, such as emphasis upon confidence, eternal life,

false teachers, love, walking in the Light, and the testimony of God' (*ibid*). Certainly, the author of these two articles does not expect discussion regarding the arrangement of the content, form and style of First John to cease. Nevertheless, the interpreter should admit a readily apparent structure to the message of First John, 'which indicates the importance for internalising the revelation and perhaps even to memorise its contents' (*ibid*).

The exegetical analysis of First John 2:28–5:21 herein yields several conclusions regarding the structure of these pericopes, as previously argued:

First John 2:28 is best understood as beginning a new section, which continues to the end of the Epistle. The reason why 2:28–3:10 is understood as a unit is because it allows for the content with which it begins to parallel 2:12 and 2:18. The next structural paragraph begins in 3:11 with the assertion ὅτι αὐτῆ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία [*for this is the message*], which is parallel to the assertion in 1:5. The unit ends with 3:18, and functions as the midpoint of the Epistle. First John 3:18 restates the assertion of 3:11 as a mitigated exhortation based upon the instruction and application given in 3:12–17. The love of Jesus and love for other believers demonstrates that one abides in the love of God, and thus, is abiding in eternal love (as opposed to abiding in death, as those who hate). First John 3:19–24 is the first indication of a potential chiasmic structure to the First Epistle of John because the emphasis upon having 'confidence before God' (3:21) is comparable to 2:28–3:10, wherein emphasis was given to the relationship between 'confidence' and 'righteousness.' ... First John 4:1–6 and 4:7–21 indicate prominence upon what is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ [*from God*]. Christians are to test the spirits because not all are ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. Believers are to love because it is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. The command to test the spirits (4:1–6) is an exhortation to maturity through correct doctrine, which reminds the reader of the emphasis in the prologue with regard to the apostolic message. The command to love (4:7–12) is emphasized in relation to abiding in God (4:13–21). Love is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, and it proves whether one abides in Him (3:11–18); therefore, the command to abide in God is evident again in 4:7–21, in close parallel to the prominence given upon God's love and the love of the believer in 2:3–17. ... The structural paragraph of 5:1–12 begins with the confession 'that Jesus is the Christ' (cf. 4:2–3), and this belief is the evidence as to whether one is fathered by God. The unit is subdivided into the propositional (5:2–5) and the evidence for those propositions (5:6–12). Coherence in 1 John 5:1–12 is evident by the following repetitions: belief in Jesus (5:1, 4–5, 10); loving fellow believers (5:1, 2–3); and, heeding God's commandments (5:2–3). The semantic correspondence within 5:12–13 (ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν [*has the life*] in v. 12 and ζωὴν ἔχετε [*have life*] in v. 13) indicates that the first half of 1 John 5 concludes with verse 12. The remainder of the Epistle provides an apologetic whereby one may proclaim the truth of God's Word so that one may know whether they have eternal life. First John 5:13–21 is the conclusion and epilogue, with 5:21 providing an appropriate exhortation and warning. (Bigalke 2013:41–42)

The message of First John addresses the matter of how the believer in Jesus Christ may be assured that fellowship with God is genuine, and it also exhorts the Christian to abide in the Lord God and Saviour. The beginning of the epistle indicates that the author was not content with spiritual immaturity amongst those who assumed fellowship with God. To

address this aspect of sanctification, it was previously argued that the message of First John reveals:

... much hortatory content to assure the believer, who is not perfect and who does sin, yet who tests the spirits and abides in God, and who is able to do so based upon the advocacy and propitiation of Christ, who the Father lovingly sent to the world. (Bigalke 2013:44–43)

Individuals who apostatise prove they never truly possessed fellowship with God:

For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 Jn 2:19)

The confirmation of an authentic fellowship with God is evidenced by living in righteousness and by heeding the revelation of God.

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