

PART VIII**CONCLUSION:
THE PROBLEM OF THE EPISTLE – CLAIMING ACCESS TO GOD
APART FROM CHRIST**

This short survey⁹¹ has demonstrated that John is determining whether a professing “Child of God” actually has a relationship with God, the Father. John determines the validity of a relationship with God based on whether one has simply believed (e.g., confessed) that Jesus is the Christ. All those who deny that Jesus is the Christ are not “Children of God.” John’s point was that their trust in the Son of God, the Christ, (Genesis 3:15, Psalm 2:7,12) prophesied by the Old Testament and realized in Jesus, truly makes them “children of God” (1 John 5:13,20).

“These things are written to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life” (5:13).

“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him (*God, the Father*) who is true; and we are in Him (*God, the Father*) who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

The basis of proof is the Old Testament and His eyewitness testimony that showed Jesus fulfilled it.

“What was from the beginning⁹², what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—“ (1:1)

⁹¹ Unfortunately due to limitations on space, this article could not deal with all the verses in depth and the basic study here will hopefully provide a contextual grid for further study in the book.

⁹² See 3:8 for a clear reference of the phrase “from the beginning” as referring to Genesis.

The Wrath of God: What is it?

This antichrist feels that he appeases the wrath of God by keeping the “works of the Law.” Thus he feels that he “has no sin” or “has not sinned” (1:8, 10). He feels this self-effort removes the reason for the wrath (i.e., sin), and thus God will not judge him. On the other hand, they threaten the “Christ-followers” because they have abandoned the works of the Law as the appeasement of God’s wrath for the sacrifice (unseen) of Christ. Thus they would claim that these “Christ-followers” would be under the wrath of God. They claim they should “fear” judgment, but John states that God’s love is “in” the believer and thus he does not need to fear judgment (4:17-18).

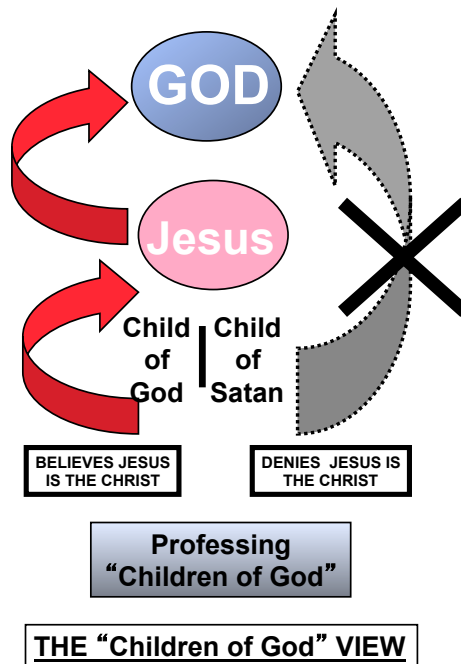
¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:17-18)

John is concerned, however, that the believers would abandon their propitiation in Christ for the works of the Law and thus, like Adam was ashamed when God appeared in the garden, there would be shame when Jesus appears to judge since they have not been faithful.

²⁸ Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (1 John 2:28)

Yet John tells his readers that there was always, and only, a sacrifice that provided appeasement for the wrath of God (“propitiation,” 2:1-2). That sacrifice was known as the propitiatory sacrifice. It was the once a year sacrificed when the priest went into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat. John then points out that this sacrifice was only anticipatory of a real, Genesis 3:15, human sacrifice of God’s Son, that would appease the wrath of God once and for all (2:1-2).

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)



Who is the Wrath Directed Toward?

While it will not be developed fully here (see the Genesis Commentary at www.BiblicalStory.org), from Genesis 3:15 there were two paths, the “seed of the serpent” and the “Seed of the Woman.” The “Seed of the Woman” was deliverance through the coming Christ, while the “seed of the serpent” pursued “righteousness” through their own eyes, through their own perception (see “The Knowledge of Good and Evil” at www.BiblicalStory.org). This, of course, was by human accomplishments and their own works as an access to God (e.g., through the works of the Law). But in addition, the issue of wrath was also dealt with by appeasing the wrath of God.

The Seed of the Woman: Vengeance (Wrath) to Come Later in the Son

When God came on the scene in Genesis 3:14, He did not judge the serpent and his followers at that time, but pronounced it to come. He then delayed the judgment until the Seed of the Woman appeared, was sacrificed, and then would implement the judgment (wrath, vengeance). Thus throughout time, the believers have loved one another who are in the family, while the followers of Satan try to eliminate and persecute the believers.

**The Seed of the Serpent:
Vengeance is in the Present in Hate toward the “Seed of the Woman”**

Those who followed the serpent would feel they were righteous through their own works. Thus those who did not keep their standards would be judged by them and vengeance would be executed. Since the Seed of the Woman would condemn the seed of the serpent for their self-righteousness, they would want to persecute them. Thus as Cain was condemned by Abel’s righteousness, he executed Abel as a judgment on whom he perceived as opposing him (who was righteous).

APPENDIX:**COMMON HERMENEUTICAL ERRORS IN FIRST JOHN****Hermeneutics That Diminish The Value Of The Old Testament**

Unfortunately past and present hermeneutical processes have contributed to relegating the Old Testament to an insignificant place in New Testament interpretation. These various interpretations have made the “inspired” New Testament author able to make changes to (“inform”) the original intent of the Old Testament passages.⁹³ This puts all the emphasis on understanding only the New Testament author. Obviously if this New Testament author was able to change/inform/interpret the Old Testament differently than a normal reading, then it would profit the present interpreter little to go to the Hebrew Scriptures when the New Testament author held the only key to knowing the interpretation. Thus original meaning in the Old Testament (obtainable through a normal reading) has been rendered unhelpful in validating the Christ since in these views it was only the New Testament author who could perceive its hidden divine meaning. The Old Testament has been moved to a position where its contribution to New Testament meaning is diminished greatly, and thus the allusions in 1 John are not pursued. Of course, this assumption restricts the interpreter from seeing that John’s source of defining terms is from the Old Testament, and thus the interpreter errantly seeks his definition from sources which John did not access.

Hermeneutics Influenced By A “Jesus” Bias

Another of the difficulties that leads interpreters to interpret John’s purpose as determining true access to Jesus (instead of access to the Father) is that interpreters have a “Jesus” bias in their interpretations. Most Christian parents who teach Bible stories to their children have experienced this phenomenon when their children answer “Jesus” to most every Bible question proffered. This same bias (which, of course, is Scripturally and theologically deserved to a major degree) continues into the academic realm. That is, while Jesus is most certainly the sole access of man to the Father, and the sole means of the full revelation of the Father to man, they almost negate the main issue confronting the Old Testament was reconciling man back with God the Father. This goal of the Old

⁹³ This includes taking the New Testament author’s testimony as proof based on its own merits. While the New Testament author is inspired, one must ask the proof of that inspiration? Typically this proof comes from the author’s own testimony (e.g., the Book of John authorizes John as inspired in the Upper Room Discourse). However, the proof of Jesus within the Book of John, which authorizes John as an inspired apostle, is Jesus’ conformance to the Old Testament. To take one’s own testimony as a proof of their own inspiration is the logical fallacy of circular reasoning or “begging the question.”

Testament was then was to be solved through that coming Son and His appearance in the flesh. It seems that frequently so much emphasis has been placed on the relationship with Jesus that the Father has been relegated into the background and seemingly has very little to do with the believer. In addition the interpreter diminishes knowing the Father as a major emphasis. Yet from the beginning to the end of the story, the purpose of the Son was to appear and reconcile all of mankind back to the Father.

²⁴ then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24)

This “Jesus” bias plays out in the epistle most frequently in the assignment of pronouns. When an interpreter of 1 John comes to the third person singular pronoun, “He,” it is a common tendency to assign it to Jesus. Yet a thorough investigation of the, sometimes more-than-obvious, grammar reveals that this is not the case. For instance, if one counts the proportion of the stated titles of the Father to the Son (e.g., Jesus, Son, Christ) in First John, they will find it is about two to one, Father to Son. Yet when it comes to the pronouns that represent these named titles, there is a tendency among interpreters to assign them more frequently to Jesus instead of the Father, and then the pronouns change their proportion significantly based on the interpreter.

For instance, in 1 John 2:6 it is stated that “the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as *He* walked.” The pronoun, “He,” is almost universally assigned by interpreters to be Jesus. In fact the NET Bible notes states, “. . . a reference to Jesus Christ is confirmed by the verb περιπατήσεν (*periepatesen*), an activity which can only describe Jesus' earthly life and ministry . . .”⁹⁴ Yet, contrary to this seemingly absolute statement of its use (“can only describe Jesus”), it is impossible to find any substantiation of this use (i.e., “walk”) anywhere in the New Testament. In fact this word is never used to describe Jesus life and ministry anywhere (i.e., Jesus walked in some spiritual or obedient sense), nor is anyone ever exhorted to “walk” with Jesus anywhere in the gospels or even the epistles.⁹⁵ In fact the very term “walk” is used in this same epistle in 1:6 (as just discussed) to speak of “walking” in the same light as the Father walked, or to walk with, or as, “He” (the Father) walked. On the other hand the usage of God “walking” or of men “walking” with God is massive. God “walks” in the Old Testament and men “walk” with Him a immense number of times, so much so that the Hebrew word for “walk” frequently carries that meaning of having a common theology with God (Genesis 3:8, 5:23, 6:9, etc.). This will be discussed later when this passage is examined, but suffice it to say here that this is typical example of where the two common views err, that is, they not infrequently use un-validated assumptions, which (as is this case with the NET Bible) seemingly come from their theology which comes

⁹⁴ “The NET Bible,” Notes on 1 John 2:6.

⁹⁵ There is one somewhat tangential reference in the epistles, in Colossians 2:6 where one is urged to “walk in Him” (ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε), where the “Him” is Jesus.

from elsewhere (but in this case is also un-validated), which tends to rule when assigning pronouns to their referent. This is, of course, the whole issue with the two common views. They have frequently assumed meanings for words and phrases (and here, pronouns) which seem to make sense to them in their contemporary situation, but which have no basis in the text.

It is not infrequent to have interpreters express this very weakness when they state, not infrequently, that the referent of the pronouns seem difficult to identify. In some cases commentators may even claim they are intentionally ambiguous.⁹⁶

Summary: **The Acknowledged Difficulty Of Interpretations**

Just about all interpreters recognize that a consistent theology along with accurate definitions has been a continual problem in analyzing the book. All Johannine academicians have perennially experienced the tentative grammatical and theological exercises needed to make their interpretations merge with their evangelical orthodoxy.⁹⁷ Examples of these uncomfortably forced exercises are; the projection of later historical heresies (late second century Gnosticism) into the time of writing (first century), the use of the contextually un-validated⁹⁸ “continuous present” (tense), and the nebulous (not to mention doctrinally uncomfortable) standard of works-related “proof of salvation” (or sanctification). Probably one of the most frequent expressions of difficulty relates to the admitted struggle to find a single meaning in 1 John as well as a single problem. This has led interpreters to cast John’s style to somewhat “free,” suggesting various patterns. To

⁹⁶ Zane Hodges states, “A synonym, *oida*, occurs six times: 3:2; 5:15 [twice], 18–20.) As often in Johannine usage, the word “Him” might refer either to God or to Christ. For John, Jesus is so closely linked with the Father that a precise distinction between the Persons of the Godhead sometimes seems irrelevant.” *The Epistle of First John*, by Zane Hodges in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 888). Edited by Walvoord, J. F., & Zuck, R. B., Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁹⁷ This has been a perennial struggle for those who hold these two common views, which uses one’s lifestyle as the criteria. This is particularly because John never seems to define the level of works needed to prove one’s profession. In addition, that nebulous standard has always been a problem, since by and large the standard must be determined from the reader’s perception of what righteous works look like. Without a clear objective standard from the apostle, reader subjectivity reigns.

⁹⁸ It is non-validated since most recent Greek commentators agree the continuous use of the present tense in 1 John is not justified by its context (See the NET Bible explanation on 1 John 3:9).

any interpreter seeking clarity in this inspired writing, these fragile conjectures belie their tenuous position.