

Is 1 John 5:13 the Primary Purpose Statement of John's Epistle?:

To What Does ταῦτα Refer?

A Paper

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The Need for this Study

Nearing the end of John's gospel a clear purpose statement is given, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."¹ According to this statement, it is apparent that John could have included much more information in his gospel, but instead he chose to include just the most pertinent information which would help to accomplish his stated objective of persuading his readership to believe in Jesus Christ, resulting in their receiving eternal life. How does this relate to John's first epistle? Nearing the end of John's first epistle, we also find a similar purpose statement,² "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." Due to the fact that most scholars believe John's statement in John 20:31 is a purpose statement for the entire gospel,³ many are led to believe that John also gives a purpose statement at the end of his first epistle which should be applied to its entirety. Akin states, "The parallel of 5:13 with the purpose statement of John's Gospel (20:31) is too apparent to be merely coincidental."⁴ The question that this paper will seek to answer is, does ταῦτα "these things" in John's 1st epistle indicate John's purpose for the writing of the entire letter, or is it a purpose statement only for the discourse which immediately precedes it? Most of the biblical authors do not have a clear statement indicating purpose. Instead, the goal(s) must be

¹ This and all subsequent quotations will be from the English Standard Version unless indicated otherwise.

² This writer accepts the widely held position of conservative scholars that the author of the Gospel of John and the epistles of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John is the apostle for whom they are named.

³ Although most scholars hold this view, it is not unanimous. John Niemela makes a strong case for John 10:10b as the key verse of John's gospel. See his article, "Finding True North In 1 John," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (2000): 25-48.

⁴ Daniel Akin, *1,2,3 John*. The New American Commentary. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 32.

determined by the content of the book as a whole. The irony is, John *does* state his purpose in writing, unfortunately for us, he does so more than once, therein lays the confusion. Each purpose statement must be carefully investigated to determine if one, several, or none of them can apply to the whole of the epistle. Establishing the correct purpose statement will have a profound impact upon the interpretation of the book as a whole and each particular passage. Because of this, a careful study of 1 John 5:13 is warranted.

Theological Biases in the Interpretation of 1 John

One must begin a study such as this by recognizing that every interpreter starts with a history. He has been brought up in a particular tradition, has had professors from a particular perspective, has an affinity for books of a particular author, and respects the opinions of certain scholars. This history of ours is often very difficult to overcome when desiring to be an impartial interpreter of the text of Scripture. In addition to this, each person has a set of presuppositions and a theological framework which too often and too quickly impacts the reading of Scripture. In the interpretational process of certain books of the Bible, such theological biases are especially visible. The epistle of 1st John is one such book. If one knows the theological background of a particular scholar, it is very predictable how that commentator will interpret the verse in question. Those who hold to a strong view of the perseverance of the saints almost always interpret $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ as a reference to the entire epistle, and take the “test of life view” of 1 John.⁵ On the other hand, those who have major theological objections to Calvinism in general, and perseverance of the saints (as defined by its adherents) in particular, will most certainly see

⁵ The test of life view was popularized by Robert Law in his commentary entitled, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John*, 3d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968. He argues that 1 John 5:13 is the primary purpose statement and contends that the contents of 1 John are an “apparatus of tests” for one to ascertain if they have authentic faith.

“these things” of 1 John 5:13, as a reference not to the entire epistle, but to only the section immediately preceding it. Those who object to 1 John 5:13 as the purpose statement for the entire book, often see the primary purpose statement in John’s first chapter.⁶ Niemela aptly states, “All too often, respected expositors lose their way in 1 John: Consulting their theology as a compass, they start their verse-by-verse hike only to become disoriented and lost.”⁷ It is important that exegetes approach the text of Scripture with no “horse in the race.” Those to whom there is no strong theological allegiance and who are able to overcome their personal history may come to the “test of life” position or the “test of fellowship” interpretation, or possibly a mediating position.

Whereas the writer of this paper has had professors who adhere to both positions, and although, already having a tentative interpretation prior to the beginning of his research, desired to evenhandedly evaluate the evidence and follow it wherever it lead, even if it required adjusting his theological and interpretive perspective.

Possible Purpose Statements in 1 John Introduced by ταῦτα

When one studies the book of 1 John, it becomes apparent that John was fond of purpose statements. A careful investigation of these statements in their original context and as a group will help us to assess which, if any, is the primary statement of purpose that governs the entire epistle. It is important to note that in all four of John’s purpose statements, and nowhere else, the Greek pronoun ταῦτα is used.

⁶ The test of fellowship view understands 1 John 1:3 as John’s purpose statement for the entire book, “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

⁷ John Niemela, “Finding True North in John” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (2000): 25.

The first possible purpose statement is found in chapter one at the beginning of John's epistle. A strong argument for this view is that the purpose statement is located upfront where one might expect to find a purpose statement of a book of this nature, written to be read to an audience. When this purpose statement is understood to be governing the entire epistle, then the whole epistle is intended to help the readers to understand what true fellowship with the almighty God looks like. This view would argue, that one of the primary heresies promoted by the "pre-agnostics"⁸ was their false-teaching related to fellowship with God. This is often referred to as the test of life interpretation of John's epistle. This view would argue that the author is combatting the false dualism of the pre-agnostics that the body is evil and the soul is good. Built upon this false dichotomy, the pre-agnostics were promoting a form of licentiousness. They seemed to argue that sinful behavior is permissible because it is done in the body, while fellowship with God involves the spirit. In this interpretation, John is teaching that fellowship with God and sinful behavior are mutually exclusive. It is not possible to be in sin and in communion with God at the same time. This view happily recognizes the other purpose statements as important, but fitting within the big picture of fellowship. In the big picture of fellowship, John is writing that they would not sin (2:1) (which would interrupt communion with God). The fellowship view would also see the content of John's teaching concerning fellowship as preventative measures to avoid the recipients of being deceived (2:26), and fellowship with God must be established upon a proper understanding of assurance of salvation (5:13). Nearly all scholars agree that purpose

⁸ Different titles have been given by various scholars to the opponents of John, some call them "secessionists" (Brown, 69; Kruse, 27), others "revisionists" (Hodges, 37) still others schismatics (Johnson, 12). The term "pre-agnostics" is helpful because it implies that this heresy pre-dates the full-blown Gnosticism of the 2nd century AD as found in the gnostic writings, while also recognizing that the content of 1 John appears to be an early form of Gnosticism.

statements two and three, as presented in the chart below, are not the primary purpose statements of John’s first epistle.

ταῦτα clauses in 1 John

Passage	Verse	Verb	Parsing
1:3-4	that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.	γράφωμεν	1 st person, plural, present, active indicative, from γραφω “we write” or “we are writing”
2:1	My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.	γράφω	1 st person, singular, present, active, indicative, from γραφω “I write” or “I am writing”
2:26	I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.	ἔγραψα	1 st person, singular, aorist, active, indicative, from γραφω, “I wrote”
5:13	I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.	ἔγραψα	1 st person, singular, aorist, active, indicative, from γραφω, “I wrote”

While they are clear purpose statements, commentators recognize that they are not general enough to encapsulate the entirety of the epistle. However, those scholars who do not see any of the purpose statements as primary in importance, only see them as statements of purpose for the sections in which they reference. This is seen in the Rensberger’s statement, “The author says that he is writing to establish and maintain a joyful fellowship, to prevent the readers from sinning, and to assure them of eternal life (1:3-4; 2:1; 5:13). These general statements gain meaning from the specific warnings and exhortations that surround them...”⁹

The fourth and final purpose statement recorded in John’s epistle is found in verse 15 of the final chapter. Many scholars believe that verse 13 is general enough to include the contents of the entire epistle. They would argue that that book’s primary purpose is to

⁹ David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 25, 138.

combat the false teaching that was propagated by the pre-gnostics, that assurance of salvation is not accessible. They would contend that the John's epistle gives a series of tests, that if you "pass," you can have assurance of salvation. In this interpretation, terms like fellowship, know, and abide do not refer to daily communion with God, but rather to positional sonship of God. For example, when these scholars read a verse such as 1 John 3:24, "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us," they see positional sonship rather than fellowship in its normative usage of the word.

A Survey of Positions Regarding ταῦτα of 1 John 5:13

Immediately after he finishes listing alternative views of interpretation regarding 1 John 5:13, Burdick ironically states, "Because of the position of this verse, standing as it does at the head of the concluding section of the epistle, it is *clear* (emphasis mine) that John intended the statement to refer to the whole book."¹⁰ In Burdick's statement, he makes three unsubstantiated conclusions: (1) 1 John 5:13 begins a new section, (2) the section beginning in verse 13 ends with the final verse of John's epistle, and (3) the intentional placement by John (if Burdick's first two assumptions are correct), necessarily means John intended this to be his purpose statement. Burdick again reiterates his position from a different angle by dogmatically stating, "the content of the whole of 1 John is *clearly* (emphasis mine) designed to provide grounds for the assurance of salvation."¹¹ Yet if this were so obvious, how is it that there are so many dissenting opinions on the matter? It only takes a quick perusal of commentaries to note that there is no "clear" or

¹⁰ Donald W. Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle: An In-depth Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 65.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 385.

unanimous understanding. Even those agreeing with Burdick's final conclusion do not agree with his premises one and two above. Such a statement by Burdick is at best wishful thinking.

There are many commentators who agree with the position of Burdick that ταῦτα of 1 John 5:13, is a reference to the purpose of the entire book. Speaking of this verse, Stott states, "For here he tells his readers the ostensible purpose of his letter...John's desire for them is...that having believed, they may know that they have received, and therefore continue to *have* (present), *eternal life*."¹² MacArthur states, "The phrase **these things** sweeps backward to encompass the entire letter..."¹³ Kruse argues, "The First Letter of John begins and ends on the note of eternal life (1:1-2; 5:20), and the theme of eternal life pervades throughout."¹⁴ Regarding verse 13, Marshall states, "he here summarizes his purpose in the composition of this Epistle."¹⁵ Culy states, "The demonstrative pronoun is anaphoric and probably refers to the entire letter."¹⁶ Grayston says verse 13, "may appropriately be regarded as a summary of the whole Epistle, rather than of the immediately preceding section." Hiebert believes, "The purpose stated in 1 John 5:13, looking back over the whole epistle, indicates John's desire to ground his readers in the personal assurance of salvation."¹⁷

¹² John R. Stott, *The Letters of John: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 186-187.

¹³ John MacArthur, *1-3 John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 155.

¹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 184.

¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall. *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 243.

¹⁶ Martin M. Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 132.

¹⁷ Edmond D. Hiebert, "An Expository Study of 1 John, Part 1 (of 10 parts): An Exposition of 1 John 1:1-4." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 199.

While there are indeed many scholars who believe ταῦτα, references the whole of the epistle, there are also many commentators who do not.¹⁸ Constable states, “The phrase ‘these things’ evidently refers to what John had just written about God’s witness (vv. 6-12) rather than to his whole epistle.”¹⁹ Hodges argues, “The phrase **These things** (Greek: Tauta) by no means refers to the entire content of the epistle, but rather to verses 6 through 12.”²⁰ Referencing 1 John 5:13, Lieu states, “Its primary role...is to bring to a conclusion the section that began in 5:4... ‘These things’ (cf. 2:26) refer back specifically to verses 4-12 and not to the letter as a whole...”²¹

The difficulty in determining the purpose of 1 John is partly related to its spiral-like progression. John does not use linear thought, as Dodd rightly states, “...the development of a theme often brings us back almost to the starting-point; almost, but not quite, for there is a slight shift which provides a transition to a fresh theme; or it may be to a theme which had apparently been dismissed at an earlier point, and now comes up for consideration from a slightly different angle.”²² This is also why the book of 1 John is so difficult to outline. Marshall illustrates the difficulty commentators face in outlining the book of 1 John. He surveys seven different commentators and the outlining approaches they take. Several unique variations appear.²³ Akin

¹⁸ All the above listed scholars and many on the chart below acknowledge that the phrase in question contextually refers to the immediately preceding verses, however they also see this purpose extending to the whole epistle.

¹⁹ Thomas H. Constable, 1 John.” <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1john.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2012)

²⁰ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love*. (Irving, TX.: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 226.

²¹ Judith Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2008.

²² Charles Harold Dodd. *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1946), xxi-xxii.

²³ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 23.

acknowledges the variety of outline methods in his statement, “There are almost as many opinions as there are commentaries on the book.”²⁴ As noted below, of the 39 commentators surveyed, 25 of them hold that 1 John 5:13 refers to the book as a whole, only 13 did not, and one had a unique interpretation (see below).

Survey of Interpretations of 1 John 5:13

Commentator	Title of Work	Year Published	Section Break	1 John 5:13 Refers to:	1 John 5:13 is the primary purpose Statement?
Dodd	The Johannine Epistles	1946	Ends Section	Entire Book	Yes
Law	The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of John	1968	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Haas	A Handbook on the Letters of John	1972	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Bultmann	The Johannine Epistles	1973	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Marshall	The Epistles of John	1978	Bridges the two sections	Entire Book	Yes
Boice	The Epistle of John	1979	Ends Section	Entire Book	Yes
Brown	The Epistles of John	1982	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Grayston	The Johannine Epistles	1984	Ends Section	Entire Book	Yes
Burdick	Letters of John the Apostle	1985	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Culpepper	1 John, 2 John, 3 John	1985	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Bruce	The Epistles of John	1986	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Hiebert	An Expository Study of 1 John	1988	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Stott	The Letters of John	1988	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Anderson	An Exegetical Summary 1, 2 & 3 John	1992	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes

²⁴ Akin, *1,2,3 John*, 37.

Commentator	Title of Work	Year Published	Section Break	1 John 5:13 Refers to:	1 John 5:13 is the primary purpose Statement?
Johnson	1, 2, and 3 John New International Biblical Commentary	1993	Bridges the two sections	Entire Book	Yes
Burge	The Letters of John, The NIV Application Commentary	1996	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Black	The First, Second, and Third Letters of John	1998	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Kruse	The Letters of John	2000	Bridges the two sections	Entire Book	Yes
Akin	1,2,3 John	2001	Ends Section	Entire Book	Yes
Thatcher	1 John The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Revised)	2006	Ends Section	Entire Book	Yes
MacArthur	1-3 John	2007	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Jones	1, 2, & 3 John	2009	Begins New Section	Entire Book	Yes
Brooke	A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles	1912	Begins New Section	Previous Verses	No
Mitchell	Fellowship: Three Letter from John	1974	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Pentecost	The Joy of Fellowship	1977	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Cook	The Theology of John	1979	NA	Previous Verses	No
Barker	1 John The Expositor's Bible Commentary 1st Edition	1981	Begins New Section	End Verses	No
Smalley	1,2,3 John	1984	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Wilkin	Assurance: That You May Know	1990	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Derickson	What is the Message of 1 John	1993	Bridges the two sections	Previous Verses	No
Hodges	The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love	1999	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Niemela	Finding True North in John	2000	NA	Previous Verses	No

Commentator	Title of Work	Year Published	Section Break	1 John 5:13 Refers to:	1 John 5:13 is the primary purpose Statement?
Rensberger	The Epistles of John	2001	Bridges the two sections	NA ²⁵	No
Lieu	I,II,III John: A Commentary	2008	Ends Section	Previous Verses	No
Yarbrough	1-3 John	2008	Begins New Section	Previous Verses	No
Constable	1 John	2012	In the Middle of Section	Previous Verses	No
Culy	I,II,III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text	2004	Begins New Section	NA	NA

It is also important to note that those who believe I John 5:13 is the primary purpose statement of 1 John are not unanimous in their understanding of how that verse fits with the verses prior to and following after it. Of the 23 who see 1 John 5:13 as the purpose statement for the whole book, 13 commentators surveyed would argue that verse 13 emulates the conclusion of John’s gospel and begins the final section, while 5 believe it concludes the previous verses and 3 see it as concluding the previous section and transitioning into the final section. The main reason this is significant to point out, is that although many argue John’s epistle is parallel to John’s gospel, even those that make this argument, not everyone does so consistently. They see the context indicating 1 John 5:13 to be concluding the section of Scripture preceding it.

Arguments for 1 John 5:13 as Primary Purpose Statement

The remainder of this paper will focus on 1 John 5:13 and determined if it is indeed the primary purpose statement for which the whole of the epistle is written. Several arguments are made by its adherents. They believe all other purpose statements are secondary in importance, or

²⁵ Rensberger sees three purpose statements, none of which are dominant over the others. David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*, 25, 138.

in some commentator's view, a reiteration of the same purpose, uniquely stated. Their arguments include: (1) similarity to John's Gospel, (2) the forming of an inclusio of 1:4 and 5:13, and (3) the repeating theme of assurance.

Similar Structure to John's Gospel

The single most repeated reason given by commentators for accepting 1 John 5:13 as the purpose statement for John's first epistle is its similarity to what is perceived to be the purpose statement of John's gospel. In fact, many commentators simply give a one-line statement and then move on. For example, Thatcher says this verse is, "notably similar to John 20:30-31."²⁶ Bultmann says it, "naturally refers back to the whole Epistle,"²⁷ with no further elaboration Stott says "Just as John 20:31... Verse 13 also..."²⁸ Boice does the same thing, "In a parallel way John now gives his purpose for writing the first Epistle, saying..."²⁹ As seen in the chart below, there are many similarities. It seems for many scholars the stark similarities between the two books are enough to persuade them.³⁰ Burdick notes, "Perhaps most important is the obvious parallel that exists between verse 13 and John 20:31."³¹

²⁶ Thomas Thatcher, "1 John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Revised Edition, eds Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006), 496.

²⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 83.

²⁸ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 186-187.

²⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 167.

³⁰ It is only fair to note, that many commentaries are written at a popular level, and the commentators may have chosen not go into detail about the purpose of epistle, and therefore only include a single sentence or two. However, the fact that the entire interpretation of this epistle rests upon this crucial decision, one would expect a stronger case to be made beyond a one sentence statement about the similarity to John's gospel.

³¹ Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle*, 385.

A Comparison of John 20:31 and 1 John 5:13

John 20:31		1 John 5:13 ³²	
ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται	But these things were written	Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν	These things I wrote to you
ἵνα	in order that	ἵνα	in order that
πιστεύ[ς]ητε	you might believe	εἰδῆτε	you might know
ὅτι	that	ὅτι	that
Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ,	Jesus is the Christ, the son of God		
καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζώῃν ἔχητε	and in order that believing you might have life	ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν	you have eternal life, the ones believing
ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.	in the name of him	εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.	in the name of the son of God

***In red are words that are identical, in blue are similar words and/or tenses, and in black are unique portions.**

When you put John 20:31 next to 1 John 5:13 similarities are especially apparent. However, a closer examination of the evidence in John's first epistle shows a lot of other similarities. In the chart below, 1 John 5:13 is compared with the other verses that begin with ταῦτα.

What is irrefutable, John's literary style included the use of reoccurring words and phrases. A closer examination of John's 1st epistle and Gospel shows he also used repetitive themes: light, darkness, walking, love, knowledge, and fellowship. When 1 John 5:13 is compared to the other ταῦτα phrases, and not exclusively with John 20:31, it becomes more apparent that similarities found in 1 John 5:13 are not unique to John's gospel alone, but throughout his 1st epistle as well. John's literary style included the repeated use of terms,

³² It is important to note that in verse 13 of 1 John 5 there is a significant variant. Most of the minuscules including K L and P read τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴ ἔχετε αἰώνιον, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύητε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. It is probable that the reading referenced in the chart above is the original reading following after the earlier and more reliable manuscripts. The most likely explanation for the surfacing of this variant is a scribal addition to make 1 John 5:13 to be more parallel to John 20:31.

concepts, and phrases. Therefore, this evidence is not conclusive. More proof must be found to find the “test of life” view to be persuasive.

A Comparison of ταῦτα clauses in I John and John 20:31

1 John 5:13		1 John 1:4		1 John 2:1		1 John 2:26		John 20:31	
Ταῦτα ἔγραψα (1st, sg, aor, act, ind)	These things I wrote	καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν (1st, pl, pres, act, ind)	and these things we write	ταῦτα γράφω (1st, sg, pres, act, ind)	These things I write to you	Ταῦτα ἔγραψα (1st, sg, aor, act, ind)	These things I wrote to you	ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται (3rd, sg, perf, pass, ind)	But these things were written
ὑμῖν	to you	ἡμεῖς,		ὑμῖν		ὑμῖν			
ἵνα	in order that	ἵνα	in order that	ἵνα	in order that	περὶ	concerning	ἵνα	in order that
εἰδῆτε (2nd, pl, perf, act, subj)	you might know	ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ἢ πεπληρωμένη. (perf, pass, part)	our joy might be complete	μὴ ἀμάρτητε. (2nd, pl, perf, act, subj)	you might not sin	τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς.	those who are trying to deceive you.	πιστεύ[ε]τε (2nd, pl, aor, act, subj)	you might believe
ὅτι	that							ὅτι	that
								Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ,	Jesus is the Christ, the son of God
ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν (masc, pl, dat, pres, act, part)	you have eternal life, the ones believing							καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες (masc, pl, nom, pres, act, part) ζωὴν ἔχητε (Perf, Act, Subj)	and in order that believing you might have life
εἰς τὸ ὄνομα	in the name							ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι	in the name
τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.	of the son of God							αὐτοῦ.	of him

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Along a same line of argumentation, Black sees a similarity of John’s Gospel prologue and the introduction to his epistle. While this does not itself prove that 1 John 5:13 and John 20:31 are parallel, it does strengthen the argument that John’s entire epistle was intended to correspond to his entire gospel. Black states, “Just as 1 John opens (1:1-4) with comments redolent of John’s prologue (John 1:1-18), so also the letter approaches its conclusion with a postscript of purpose similar to the colophon of the Fourth Gospel.”³⁴

³³ In red you find identical words, in blue similar words, in black unique words.

³⁴ Black, “The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,” 442.

A Comparison of Introductions in 1 John and John

<p>1 John “from the beginning” (v. 1) “what we have looked at [ἐθεασάμεθα, <i>etheasametha</i>] (v. 1) “the word” (λόγος <i>logos</i>, v. 1) “life” (v. 1) “with [πρός <i>pros</i>] the Father” (v. 2)</p>	<p>John 1 “in the beginning” (vv. 1-2) “we have seen [ἐθεασάμεθα <i>etheasametha</i>] his glory” (v. 14) “the word” (λόγος <i>logos</i>, v. 1) “life” (v. 4) “with [πρός <i>pros</i>] God” (v. 1)</p>
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While supportive of the case for 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement, it is far from conclusive. Again, John likes to use reoccurring themes and phrases. It must be pointed out, that John’s Gospel was probably intended to bring into the mind of the readers the Genesis account, but this does not mean it follows the outline and structure of Genesis. In fact, there are vast amounts of dissimilarities between John’s Gospel and his first epistle. Similarities to John’s Gospel and first epistle can also be found in the book of Revelation. John uses ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν “we bore witness” in Revelation and μαρτυροῦμεν “we witness” in John’s Epistle. John’s gospel speaks of John the Baptist who μαρτυρήσῃ “bore witness.” John speaks of the λόγος “word” in all three literary works, and all three focus on the revelation of Jesus Christ. Once again, all that is proven thus far is, John often uses repetitive concepts, phrases, and terminology.

³⁵ Illustration taken from page 442 of Black’s commentary.

The Formation of an Inclusio

A second argument made by some who see 1 John 5:13, as the primary purpose statement of John's first epistle is what they consider an inclusio. Some see John 1:4 and John 5:13 as "book ends" of the epistle. Burdick states,

"...there is a parallelism between 1:4 and 5:13. In 1:4 John uses the present tense γράφομεν, 'we are writing,' to describe his task in its beginning, whereas in 5:13 he employs the aorist indicative (ἔγραψα, "I have written") to look back on the task he has completed. Both are complementary statements of purpose."³⁶

Brown also sees an inclusion, "1 John 5:13 constitutes an inclusio with the 'We are writing this' of the epistolary Prologue..."³⁷ While at first glance the thought of an inclusio does seem appealing, however when one takes into account the fact that there are not just two, but rather four purpose statements beginning with ταῦτα, as Niemela states, "renders the notion of bookends unsupportable."³⁸ It is more likely that the four ταῦτα statements function as some structural markers rather than book ends. Adherents to this view often speak of the use of an "epistolary aorist" in verse 13 of chapter 5. In this vein of thought Thatcher states, "In this usage, the aorist tense represents the perspective of the reader for whom the writing of the letter is a past event. John is therefore attempting to summarize what he has already written in 1 John."³⁹ Jones speaks of an epistolary aorist as indicating what will, "be by the time of the reading rather than writing."⁴⁰ Arguing for an epistolary aorist does not prove that 1 John 5:13 refers to the entire epistle. Smalley states,

³⁶ Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle*, 385.

³⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*. Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 608.

³⁸ Niemela, "Finding True North in John," 36.

³⁹ Thatcher, "1 John," 497.

⁴⁰ Peter Rhea Jones, *1, 2, & 3 John*. (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc, 2009), 225.

For the use of ἔγραψα, “I have written,” which is an epistolary aorist, see 2:14,21. As in 2:14, the verb emphasizes an assurance...whether John is referring to the letter as a whole or to 5:5-12, when he says, “I have written this,” a past tense of the verb (as in the aorist ἔγραψα, “I have written”) is entirely in place.⁴¹

As explained by Smalley, the epistolary aorist argument can be used to support the contention that 1 John 5:13 refers to verses 5-12 just as it can the whole book. Both positions can argue that the content in question is, “already present to the writer’s mind.”⁴² Therefore this grammatical insight is not definitive, nor helpful.

The Repeating Theme of Assurance

Burdick states, “Content as a whole of 1 John is clearly designed to provide grounds for the assurance of salvation.” It is true, eternal life and the certainty of it, is a reoccurring theme (2:29; 3:24; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 12). It seems from the reading of 1 John, that the pre-gnostics were not only attacking the teachings by John on fellowshiping with God, they were also attacking the idea of assurance. Rensberger rightly concludes, “The opponents may have begun to shake the readers’ confidence in their salvation, and therefore **one** (emphasis mine) purpose for writing 1 John was to undergird that confidence.”⁴³ Assurance of salvation is of extreme importance in the life of a believer especially as it pertains to abiding in Christ. Therefore it is not strange that much time would be devoted to this subject, but this need not indicate that it be the **only** subject.

⁴¹ Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*. (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 277.

⁴² A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*. International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 9.

⁴³ David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 138.

Problems with 1 John 5:13 as Primary Purpose Statement

There are significant literary, thematic, theological, and contextual problems viewing 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement of John's epistle.

Literary Problems

There are significant issues relating to the literary style used by John that argue against 1 John 5:13 being the primary purpose statement. These literary features include: (1) John's consistent usage of the relative pronoun $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$, (2) the specific genre of public reading, and (3) the nature of purpose statements in literature

John's Usage of $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$

As seen in the chart above, John consistently uses the Greek relative pronoun $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ to introduce purpose statements (1:4; 2:1; 2:26, and 5:13). It is virtually unanimously accepted that 2:1 is the purpose for the preceding verses (1:6–10) and not the epistle as a whole. The $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ phrase in 2:26 is also a statement of purpose for its preceding verses (2:18-25), not the epistle as a whole. A strong argument can be made for the $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ of 1 John 1:4 to refer back to the content of verse 1-3 and not the epistle as a whole. Therefore, it is prudent and consistent to view the apostle John's $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ clause of 5:13, to indicate a near referent (immediately preceding verses) rather than the entire epistle. We also see a pattern by John in using $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ phrases in the fourth Gospel to reference the content immediately preceding (John 15:11, 17). John's literary style points to near referents. Is it possible for 5:13 to also speak of to the entire book in addition to the immediately preceding verses? Yes, it is possible, but the burden of proof is upon those who would like to broaden its scope. This proof is nowhere to be found, in fact the evidence and pattern of John seems to be quite the contrary.

Genre of Public Reading

Throughout this paper, John's literary work has been called an epistle, however, there is great speculation by scholars as to the actual nature of it. Segovia states, "Whereas the designation of 2 and 3 John as 'letters' has never been seriously questioned, given their basic agreement with epistolary conventions of the first century CE, the search for the exact genre of 1John has remained a topic of considerable debate in the literature."⁴⁴ The epistle neither begins nor ends like the New Testament epistles we are accustomed to reading.⁴⁵ It does not start with: the name of writer, name of addressee(s), and greeting, as ancient letters typically contain. This has caused many various designations to be attributed to it. This is reflected in Thompson's comments, "1 John lacks the features that characterize genuine correspondence, and has been variously called a treatise, sermon, tract or pastoral manual... It is possible that 1 John was sent to more than one congregation; some have suggested it was originally written (and read aloud) in small segments to a congregation in the author's vicinity or to which he belonged."⁴⁶

Some of the discrepancies with ancient letters can be accounted for by understanding that this was a letter written for distribution to a variety of churches. It is also likely that it was to be read aloud. With these factors in mind, it seems unlikely for the primary purpose statement to be found at the end of a letter. Derickson, who holds to 1 John 1:3-4 as the primary purpose statement argues, "Since the epistle was written to be read aloud to a listening audience, John logically stated his purpose at the beginning of the writing"⁴⁷ Tilden's comments are also helpful,

⁴⁴ Fernando F. Segovia, "Recent Research in the Johannine Letters" *Religious Studies Review* 13 (1987): 132.

⁴⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, 25.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *1-3 John*, 18.

“One will notice at once that this is an ‘epistle’ in name and tone, though not in form, for it lacks the opening and closing conventions...it lacks the personal notes included in the end of that writing. It is anonymous...It is oral rather than literary in style.”⁴⁸ Previously he also wrote, “...I John was written to be read...”⁴⁹

Thatcher states, “Whether or not 1 John can be ascribed to a specific genre, it seems likely that the book was a circular intended to be read aloud in meetings of the various house churches under John’s jurisdiction.”⁵⁰ This is the best explanation for the abnormal style of the letter, which also argues against 1 John 5:13 as primary purpose statement. An orally read letter would unlikely reserve the primary purpose statement to the end. If there is a primary purpose statement, it would be expected to be near the beginning.

The Nature of Purpose Statements

A purpose statement, if it is to be the primary purpose statement for the whole book, must be inclusive enough to entail every verse, every chapter, and every theme of a given book. If a statement is not capable of such, then it is disqualified to be the primary purpose statement. All the content of 1 John, does not lead one to gain assurance of salvation (5:13), neither does all of the verses prevent one from sinning (2:1), nor does the whole book warn of deceivers (2:26) or bring John and the collective “we” joy (1:4). A broader and more inclusive statement must be found to be a legitimate primary purpose statement.

⁴⁷ Derickson quotes Johnson in support of his position, Gary W. Derickson, “What is the Message of 1 John?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 98.

⁴⁸ Elwyn E. Tilden Jr., “The First Epistle of John, *Studia Biblica* 4 (1950): 195.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 193.

⁵⁰ Thatcher, “1 John,”

Thematic Problems

To contend that 1 John 5:13 is a summary statement for the contents of the whole book does not do justice to the concepts of “fellowship,” “abiding,” and “knowing,” as John uses these terms. The word *κοινωνία* most often translated “fellowship” sometimes translated “communion,” or “share,” comes from the Greek root *κοινός*, which means “common.”⁵¹ Louw-Nida defines this term as, “an association involving close mutual relations and involvement. The apostle Paul uses it in this manner (Php 1:5; 2 Cor 6:14; 13:14).”⁵² It is also used by John three times (1:3, 6, 7). Black rightly concludes, “In the NT’s Johannine tradition...*κοινωνία* (koinonia) is used of “active [Christian] participation” in much the way that we find in Paul’s letters...”⁵³ It is unfortunate that many scholars in their attempt to understand 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement, reject the normative usage of *κοινωνία*.⁵⁴ Johnson is one such scholar, he states, “The author (and the apostolic community he represents, hence the **we**) **proclaims** this message about the **Word of Life**, in order that those who hear it might join “the circle of salvation,” i.e., those who **have fellowship with** God (which, according to John 17:3, is eternal life).⁵⁵ Boice also argues along these lines. He seeks to answer the question that is begged: if John’s epistle is about assurance of eternal life, why does John speak of fellowship? Boice’s answer is not satisfactory, “John speaks of fellowship rather than salvation in these

⁵¹ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. “*κοινωνία*” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-).

⁵² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

⁵³ Black, “The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,” 382-383.

⁵⁴ See Lieu for a good overview of the normative usage of *κοινωνία* in ancient times, 44.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 26.

verses, perhaps because the fellowship had been so recently broken by the Gnostic schism.”⁵⁶ A more probable answer is that John speaks of fellowship to respond to the gnostic wrong ideas of fellowship as indicated in the “if” statements of 1:6, 1:8, and 1:10.

Stott too confuses fellowship with salvation, “The purpose of the proclamation of the gospel is, therefore, stated in terms not of salvation but of fellowship. Yet, properly understood, this is the meaning of salvation in its widest embrace, including reconciliation to God in Christ...”⁵⁷ And again this mistake is seen in Burdick’s words, “To place one’s faith in the incarnate Christ is to enter a fellowship which includes God the Father and God the Son as well as all those who possess saving faith... To be a Christian is the same as being in fellowship with Him.”⁵⁸ While it is true, that to place one’s faith in Christ is to enter into fellowship with God, John teaches that this fellowship/communion can be interrupted by sin and requires confession of sin for restoration (1 John 1:9). If fellowship is equal to salvation then the Christian is in a precarious position every time he sins. I John 1:9 is written in the context of fellowship. Akin makes an interpretive mistake similar to those listed above when he says, “John’s purpose statements in 1 John 1:3 and in 1 John 5:13 are, thus practical equivalents... Failure to persevere in this faith is, by implication, to exclude oneself from the apostolic fellowship, fellowship with God the Father and with his Son, and eternal life.”⁵⁹ Akin makes a mess out of the text, speaking of perseverance – this is a sure example of superimposing one’s theology into the text.

⁵⁶ Boice, *The Epistles of John*, 31.

⁵⁷ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 68.

⁵⁸ Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle*, 21.

⁵⁹ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 58.

Combs gives a typical “test of life” interpretation of 1 John 1:6,

So if one claims to enjoy fellowship with God, that is, to share in the life of God, to be a genuine believer, and yet live habitually in sin, disregarding the commands about holiness, John concludes that person is a liar. The one who fails to persevere in holiness does not have fellowship with God; he is not a genuine believer.⁶⁰

In his commentary of this passage, Combs supplements the idea of habitually sinning, yet the context neither warrants nor allows such an addition. However, Combs theological system and usage of the term fellowship necessitates it.

Since John is writing to believers as implied several times (1:12, 13, 14) and clearly stated at other times (2:12-14, 21; 5:13), why would John offer believers eternal life? Of course he would not! Derickson argues that when you interpret *κοινωνία* in light of the “test of fellowship” view, “[T]he word for fellowship (*κοινωνία*) is allowed its normal, non-soteriological sense.”⁶¹ Derickson goes on to say,

Fellowship should be understood in its natural sense as expressing relationship or communion, rather than merely possession of a common property. Abiding should be understood in the Pauline sense of walking in the Spirit rather than being in Christ. This is supported in part from the Johannine use of abiding in John 15, which need not be understood soteriologically. Eternal life refers to quality of life, as in John 10:10, rather than salvation. Knowing God is not equivalent to being saved, but is the result of walking with Him in fellowship.⁶²

Mitchell too, speaks of fellowship in a similar manner that makes sense of the passage and its context, “In John’s Gospel we have *life* through the Incarnate Word of God. In his Epistle, we have *fellowship* through the Incarnate Word of God.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Combs, *Meaning of Fellowship in First John*, 9.

⁶¹ Derickson, “What is the Message of 1 John?” 105.

⁶² *Ibid*, 97.

⁶³ John G. Mitchell, *Fellowship: Three Letters from John* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1974), 14.

I believe Smalley catches the significance of the theological implications of fellowship, “Christian fellowship is not the sentimental and superficial attachment of a random collection of individuals, but the profoundly mutual relationship of those who remain ‘in Christ’ and therefore belong to one another (cf. 3:23-24).”⁶⁴ Smalley hits on another important idea to consider, abiding. Other terms of communion are used by John in this epistle, words such as μένω “abide” and the concept of γινώσκω / οἶδα “knowing” God in a deep intimate way. The Greek verb μένω “to remain/abide” is used 55 times by John. John uses it more than double of all other New Testament authors combined. In John’s Gospel it is used 34 times and in his first epistle it is used 18 times. The concept of abiding is manifestly important to John. The concept of “remaining” is clear. Believers are to abide/remain in the light (2:10), the word of God is to abide/remains in us (2:14), we are commanded to abide/remain in Christ (2:28). When we abide/remain in Christ we do not sin (3:6). The love of God does not abide in us when we do not show compassion on others (3:17). John’s teaching of abiding in Christ is synonymous with being in fellowship with Christ.

John regularly uses the Greek verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα which are both translated “to know.” In certain contexts, he uses these terms in an experiential manner, for example: “we have come to know him” (2:3), “the world does not know us (3:1), “we have come to know and believe the love which God has for us.” (4:16)

Understanding 1 John 5:13 as John’s primary purpose statement does not account for John’s repeated usage of the terms μένω, γινώσκω, and οἶδα when they are used in a communal sense. Yarbrough rightly concludes,

⁶⁴ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 12.

...what he [John] reports is intended to nurture fellowship: he writes so that his readers “may have fellowship with us...John continues, this is not just any fellowship at all, but that fellowship shared peculiarly by those who know God the Father in his Son Jesus Christ...John writes, then, to promote unity and harmony, what the Apostles’ Creed calls ‘the communion of saints,’ both with God and with one another.⁶⁵

The purpose statement of 1 John 5:13, is simply not exhaustive enough to include the biblical understanding of fellowship as taught by John, and therefore is not the primary purpose statement for the whole book.

Theological Problems

There are significant theological implications to the acceptance of 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement, at least, in the manner it is articulated by many of its adherents: (1) the lack of genuine assurance and (2) the potential legalistic application.

Lack of Genuine Assurance

Those that hold to 1 John 5:13 as **the** purpose statement of this epistle, commonly referred to the “test of life” view, argues that John gives a multitude of tests for the individual to determine whether he is indeed a believer or not. Derickson makes an astute observation,

The Tests of Life view ends up holding that failure indicates a lack of life. Every Christian who is honest must admit to some habitual sin, whether great or small. Yet if the practice of sin or righteousness in 1 John 3 proves the presence of death or life, then one is forced to decide “how much is too much.” Thus arguing that John intended these tests as indicators of the presence or absence of eternal life is both indefensible and dangerous.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 41.

⁶⁶ Derickson, “What is the Message of 1 John?,” 99.

The result of the application of the “test of life” view precludes the possibility of assurance of salvation. According to this view, assurance can only be attained when an individual is able to pass a series of tests.

1. Complete Obedience to God’s Commandments

“and by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:” (1 John 2:3-4)

2. Continuous Love for the Brethren

“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:9-11)

3. Absence of Love for the World

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:15-16)

Unfortunately every believer flunks these tests many times over because these tests are unattainable indefinitely. John’s statements are unequivocal. As interpreted by the “test of life” view, there is no room for failure, failure means the lack of salvation. Wilken also sees the logical contradiction in accepting 5:13 as the primary purpose statement,

“Since the rest of the epistle calls the readers to examine their works, and since no believers works are perfect according to John himself (1 John 1:8, 10), then absolute assurance of salvation is impossible and the expression “that you may know” must refer to something less than certainty.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robert N. Wilkin, ““Assurance: That You May Know”” (1 John 5:11-13a)”, *Grace Evangelical Society News* 5:12 (December 1990): 1.

The ramifications of the “test of life” interpretation are seen in the statements of its opponents (as indicated in the quotes above) but also in its proponents. Law a proponent of this view states, “And in general, it has to be asserted that the epistle acknowledges no certitude of personal salvation other than is based on the fulfillment of those tests. In its scheme of thought no place is provided for any immediate, self-certifying consciousness of regenerate life.”⁶⁸

The only theological system that can consistently account for the continual “passing” of these tests is the Wesleyan position of “sinless perfection.” Of course, the Wesleyan system has other major glaring theological and biblical problems associated with it, which precludes it from being a viable option. John himself says, “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:10). John, in this very verse, prohibits a “test of life” interpretation. Some other explanation of the text must be discovered.

Scripture seems to indicate elsewhere that although there are outward signs of a follower of Christ (fruit, love for the Word, and love for the brethren), assurance of salvation is based upon the promises of God, as 1 John 5:12, John 5:24 and John 6:47 make apparent. Niemela states, “Does the apostle John deny the bedrock certainty of passages like John 5:24 and 6:47? Law’s construct of 1 John fundamentally contradicts the Gospel of John and misconstrues 1 John.”⁶⁹ When referring to 1 John 5:13, Stott rightly states, “If God’s revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting his word, not in trusting it.”⁷⁰ The Bible records many instances of individuals who

⁶⁸ Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 279.

⁶⁹ Niemela, “Finding True North in John,” 34.

⁷⁰ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 187.

had absolute assurance of salvation Paul (2 Tim 1:12), Timothy (1 Tim 1:2), Titus (Titus 1:4), Cornelius (Acts 10:47).⁷¹

Potential of Legalistic Application

The unintended consequences of applying a particular text does not necessarily indicate whether an interpretation is correct or incorrect, nor can abuses of an application of a text deter us from being honest with Scripture, yet the implications should still be understood, and must fit with the character of God as revealed in Scripture. Those who hold to the “test of life” interpretation can fall into the trap of making judgments about an individual’s eternal status. This judgment is made based upon what the “judge” perceives to be a failure to live in light of God’s standards. Although we are commanded to examine ourselves (2 Cor 13:5), we are not commanded to judge whether another person is a believer. Even after the steps of church disciplined are followed (Matt 18), we are commanded to **treat** that individual(s) as an unbeliever. It does not say that they **are** an unbeliever, but rather to treat them **as** one (18:17). Whereas their lifestyle does not follow that which should characterize a Christian, that does not necessarily mean they are not one. Only God knows the heart of man. What is clear in Scripture however, God disciplines and chastens his children when they are not walking in the light (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19).

The danger of legalism is illustrated in Akin’s commentary of 1 John 2:19. He states, “Those who depart from the visible fellowship of the church never were part of the fellowship, that is, they never believe in Christ Jesus and never had eternal life.”⁷² Is John really saying that anyone who leaves the assembly of believers was never a believer to begin with, or is he, as an

⁷¹ Wilkin, “Assurance: That You May Know’ (1 John 5:11-13a),” 1.

⁷² Akin, *1,2,3 John*, 61.

apostle of God, under the inspiration of God, specifically referring to the pre-agnostics who left there assembly and to whose heresy he refutes? If it is the former, then this should be applied in the same way today. If it is the latter, there is no specific equivalent today. We do not have an apostle like John who can receive special revelation from God as to genuineness of one's faith. If it is the former, is everyone that leaves the assembly an unbeliever or just those that are gone for a particular duration of time? Rensberger sees the issue clearly,

...while the author is certainly not writing *to* the opponents, he does seem to be writing *about* them,...In the passages noted above (see also 3:23; 4:15; 5:1, 5-13), the author speaks of people whom he calls antichrists, deceivers, and false prophets, who "went out from us" and who fail to confess that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, or to confess "Jesus Christ having come in flesh"⁷³

Brooke also recognizes John to be addressing a specific historical situation, "The victory has been won, if only after a hard-fought battle, and the opponents, whose errors have been unmasked, 'have gone out from among us,' or at least the leaders of the movement have withdrawn or been expelled."⁷⁴ Rensberger and Brooke are correct, the words penned by John, in 1 John 2:13 are written about the pre-agnostics. The application of the test of life interpretation, as illustrated in the position of Akin can lend itself to judgments that are reserved for God alone.

Contextual Problems

Not only are there theological, literary, and thematic problems in interpreting 1 John 5:13 as the purpose statement for the whole epistle, there are also significant contextual problems. These contextual problems pertain to both, John 20:31 and 1 John 5:13.

⁷³ Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*, 21-22.

⁷⁴ Brooke, xxviii.

John 20:31

As articulated previously, the strongest argument for the ταῦτα of 1 John 5:13 to be a reference to the entire epistle, and introducing the primary purpose statement of John, is its noticeable similarity with the conclusion of John's gospel. This line of argumentation is contingent upon two premises: (1) John 20:31 is the purpose statement for the entire gospel, and (2) 1 John 5:13 is following the example of John 20:31. If either of these premises or both are found fallacious, the whole theory collapses.

Burdick, in his typical dogmatic way, when speaking of John 20:31 says, “[S]ince it is certain that the latter verse refers to the whole book, it seems most probably that 1 John 5:13 likewise looks back to the whole epistle.” But in all actuality, it could be that verse 31 is not the purpose statement of John's Gospel, and if it is not, then John 20:31 actually becomes evidence against the theory that 1 John 5:13 is the purpose statement for this epistle.⁷⁵ Observing the entire passage, where John 20:31 is found, without the supplemented verse and chapter breaks is helpful.

*Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Now Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but **these** are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Some basic observations should be noted. (1) Jesus had just given a sign⁷⁶ to the twelve in general and to Thomas specifically. (2) This sign was his appearance to them in bodily form with

⁷⁵ Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle* , 385.

the markings upon His body from the crucifixion. (3) The Greek noun here σαμεία is plural and neuter. (4) The Greek relative pronoun ταῦτα is also plural and neuter. (5) John uses ταῦτα to refer back to the σημεῖα performed in the presence of the disciples. (6) There is no contextual indicator that would cause us to believe ταῦτα refers to the entire Gospel.

The contextual clues makes it most reasonable to understand ταῦτα to be a reference to the signs that John recorded in his gospel, “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Therefore, John 20:31 is not a purpose statement for the whole book but rather the signs recorded with in it.⁷⁷ It is important to note, that **the** purpose statement for any book of the Bible must be comprehensive enough to include the entirety of the literary work. John 20:31 is too narrow of a purpose statement and does not account for all the details in it.

While finding a genuine purpose statement of John’s gospel is not in the scope of this paper, Niemela makes a compelling case for an alternative view.⁷⁸ He argues that the very words of Jesus recorded in John 10:10b is John’s purpose statement. Here Jesus says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Choosing such a purpose statement recognizes that the content of John’s gospel is not just for unbelievers but also for believers. Niemela states, “that people *may have life*, is for unbelievers (as is John 20:31)... that those having life *may have it more abundantly*, is for believers.”⁷⁹

The evidence from the context of John 20:31, argues against, and not for, it being the primary purpose statement of John’s Gospel. Since the primary argument given by scholars holding to 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement is based upon a premise that John 20:31 is the Gospel’s purpose statement, this theory fails.

⁷⁶ Signs were a repeated theme throughout John’s Gospel. He used the Greek noun shvmeion 17 times. This is 7 more times than any of the other gospel authors.

⁷⁷ For a good development of this theory see Niemela’s journal article “Finding True North in John.”

⁷⁸ Niemela, “Finding True North in John,” 28.

⁷⁹ Niemela, “Finding True North in John,” 28.

1 John 5:13

If the premise is established that John 20:31 is the purpose statement for John's Gospel, (although this writer believes he has proven otherwise), premise two must also be shown true, for the "test of life" theory to stand. There are no contextual clues that point to 1 John 5:13 as the primary purpose statement for the whole book, on the other hand there is evidence that it refers to the content immediately preceding it? Speaking of 1 John 5:13, Brooke states,

The present verse does not really present an exact parallel to the conclusion of the Gospel (Jn. xx. 31) which immediately precedes the appendix (ch. xxi.)... Here it would seem most natural to refer the words to the preceding section of the Epistle (v. 1-12), in which the writer has put forward his view of Faith in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, as the necessary condition of the realization of that spiritual life which God has given to men through Jesus Christ, and which again is the real witness of God to the nature and character of His Son.⁸⁰

Other scholars, such as Kruse (295), Brown (632), and Stott (186) are honest with the evidence. They recognize that verse 13 first and foremost refers to the immediate context, but they go further, believing it also gives meaning to the entire epistle. Law, the father of the "test of life" even admits that 1 John 5:13, "... refer[s] to the contents of 5:6-12, and most directly to 5:11,12."⁸¹ It is hard to believe that some scholars can completely overlook two important facts: (1) the verse immediately preceding it speaks of eternal life, and (2) as eluded to above, John uses the exact same construction in 2:26 (ταῦτα + the aorist) to refer to the content immediately preceding it. Lieu rightly argues, "the reminder that they are hearing or reading what he has written to them ("to you") does not introduce a new section but serves to sum up and drive home the significance of what has preceded, just as it does at 2:1, 21, 26. 'These things' (cf. 2:26) refer back specifically to verse 4-12 and not to the letter as a whole, even if the aspiration is not

⁸⁰ Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, 142.

⁸¹ Law, *The Tests of Life*, 405.

inappropriate for it.”⁸² It is most probable that verse 13 is **a** purpose statement, not **the** purpose statement of John’s gospel. It gives the purpose for verses 4-12.

Suggestions for Consideration

It is not the intent of this paper to necessarily establish the exact purpose statement of 1 John, but rather to investigate the statement found in 5:13 as to its purpose and scope. In the opinion of this author, sufficient evidence has been given to preclude the applying of the statement recorded in 5:13 to the book as a whole. The research and writing of this paper has led this author to propose five suggestions, three pertaining to research in general, and two regarding further study of John in particular.

Regarding Research in General

First, students of the Bible must begin by recognizing their personal preconceptions and theological biases, while also seeking to be honest with the text. This involves a willingness to follow the text wherever it leads, even if it requires adjusting one’s theological positions and interpretations. 1 John is one of the most abused books of the Bible, where individuals have performed eisegesis. They often come to the text seeking to prove what they already believe.

Second, exegetes must be careful to investigate all the evidence prior to accepting the assumptions of those who have gone before. They must start from the beginning with a careful study of the text, not begin with a presupposed purpose statement, no matter how many adhere to it. Too often, students of the Bible put the cart before the horse. They start with a purpose statement rather than starting with the text.

Thirdly, the exegete must recognize that it is the meaning of the text that establishes the purpose of the text. It is not the presupposed purpose that determines the meaning of the text. Scholars must

⁸² Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 220-221.

investigate the text carefully, and interpret it honestly, passage by passage before a primary purpose statement (if the author has one), is established. The following statement by Jones's illustrates exactly what should not be done,

I am indebted to Robert Law's classic *The Tests of Life*, in which he pointed out that 1 John is an "apparatus of tests." He meant that the Epistle contains numerous tests, frequently repeated, that allow one to ascertain the presence of authentic faith.... This fundamental insight immediately enlarges one's understanding of the Epistle, allowing one to reflect upon its intent as well as its continuing relevance.⁸³

I fear many scholars have failed to follow the three suggestions above, which has led them to make similar mistakes to that of Jones.

Regarding Further Study of 1 John

While an exact purpose statement for John has not been established (and as stated above it is not the scope of this paper), this paper has argued that 1 John 5:13 is not the primary purpose statement, the theories of Rensberger and Niemela's are worth further consideration. Rensberger states, "The author says that he is writing to establish and maintain a joyful fellowship, to prevent the readers from sinning, and to assure them of eternal life (1:3-4; 2:1; 5:13). These general statements gain meaning from the specific warnings and exhortations that surround them..."⁸⁴ Rensberger's understanding seems to fit with the research done for this paper. John seems to routinely use $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ clauses to give key purpose statements for near referents.

Niemela agrees with Rensberger, and makes an additional contention worth further investigation, "The natural referent of each purpose statement is the paragraph immediately preceding it... 1 John 1:1-3 expresses John's audience-centered purpose for announcing his message, while 1:4 gives the author-centered purpose. In other words, John sought for his

⁸³ Peter Rhea Jones, *1, 2, & 3 John*. (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc, 2009), 3.

⁸⁴ Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*, 25.

readers to benefit from fellowship with God, while he desired (as a result of their fellowship) to have greater joy.”⁸⁵ If Niemela is correct, the primary purpose for John’s writing, (which is not introduced by a $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ clause), is that they experience the deep intimate fellowship with God, that John himself experienced. The purpose statement introduced in verse four, which **is** introduced by the $\tau\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha$ clause, relates to the joy John experiences when he shares with them about the fullness of eternal life, deep fellowship with God. The conclusions of Rensberger and Niemela appear to fit the literary style of John, maintain thematic unity, is theological coherent, and contextually consistent. They warrant further consideration.

⁸⁵ Niemela, “Finding True North in John,” 40.

Appendix A: Proposed Outline of 1 John

- I. Introduction: The Credentials of John to Speak about Fellowship with Christ (1:1-2a)
 - A. John New of the Eternal Christ (1a)
 - B. John Heard Christ's Words (1b)
 - C. John saw Christ For Himself (1c)
 - D. John Inspected Christ Carefully (1d)
 - E. John Felt Christ Personally (1e)
 - F. John Experienced Life with Christ (2)

- II. John's Proclamation about Fellowship with Christ(1:2b-5)
 - A. The Content of John's Proclamation: What He Saw and Heard (Personal Experience) (2-3a)
 - B. The Purpose of John's Proclamation: For Believers to Experience the Same Intimate Fellowship with Christ that Can only be Enjoyed in Apostolic Truth (b)
 - C. The Result of John's Proclamation: Joy (4)
 - D. The Source of John's Proclamation: From Christ Himself (5a)

- III. The Principles of Genuine Fellowship in Christ (Passed on from Christ Himself) (1:5-2:2)
 - A. Genuine Fellowship in Christ Requires Obedience to God's Commands (5b-7)
 1. God's nature is one of holiness and not sinfulness (5b)
 - a. God is holy (Light)
 - b. God is without sin (Darkness)
 2. We cannot Fellowship with God (who is light) when we are disobedient to His commands (walk in darkness) at the same time. (6)
 3. We can have fellowship with God when we are obedient to His commands (walking in the light as he is in the light) (7)
 - B. Genuine Fellowship in Christ Requires Acknowledgment and Confession of Sin (8-9)
 1. Fellowship in Christ requires us to recognize the truth: we are sinners (8)
 - a. To deny we are sinners is to call God a liar (10a)
 - b. To deny we are sinners is to reject God's Word (10b)
 2. Fellowship in Christ requires confession of sins when they are committed (9)
 - C. Genuine Fellowship in Christ is Made Possible Because of Christ's Work (1b-2)
 1. He is our advocate when we sin 1b)
 2. His sacrifice is sufficient (2)
 - a. His sacrifice is sufficient to pay for our sins (2a)
 - b. His sacrifice is sufficient to pay for the sins of the entire world (2b)

- IV. Principles of Genuine Knowledge of God (2:3-11)
 - A. Concerning Obedience and Disobedience (3, 5-6)
 1. Genuine Knowledge of God Involves Obedience to God's Commands (3)
 - a. God's Love is made complete through obedience (5a)
 - b. Fellowship requires obedience (5b)

- c. Fellowship requires living like Christ lived (6)
 - 2. Genuine Knowledge of God Does Not Involve Disobedience to God's Commands (4)
 - B. Concerning Love for the Brethren (7-11)
 - 1. This is a new and old commandment (7-8)
 - 2. When we "hate" our brethren we are walking in darkness (9)
 - a. We don't know where we are going (11a)
 - b. We are blinded by darkness (11b)
 - 3. When we love our brethren we walk in light (10)
- V. An Aside on the Applicable Nature of John's Message (2:12-14)
 - A. John's Message is Applicable for Children (12, 13c)
 - B. John's Message is Applicable for Fathers (13a, 14)
 - C. John's Message is Applicable for Young Men (13b, 14b)
- VI. Warnings Concerning Love for the World (2:15-17)
 - A. John Commands His Readers Not to Love the Worldly System (15a)
 - B. John Informs His Readers, when They Love the Worldly System, God's Love is Not in Them (15b)
 - C. John Describes the Worldly System (16)
 - 1. Lust of the Flesh (16a)
 - 2. Lust of the Eyes (16b)
 - 3. Pride of Life (16c)
 - D. John Reminds His Readers of the Temporal and Eternal (17)
 - 1. The worldly system is temporal (17a)
 - 2. The believer will live eternally (17b)
- VII. Warnings Concerning and Descriptions of Anti-Christ (2:18-27)
 - A. Warnings Concerning Anti-Christ (18-19)
 - 1. Anti-Christ were Prophesied About in Times Past (18a)
 - 2. Anti-Christ are Here (18b)
 - 3. Anti-Christ Departed the Assembly (19b)
 - B. Description of the Anti-Christ (20-27)
 - 1. Anti-Christ have Departed the Assembly (19b))
 - 2. Believers have the anointed one to help them know the anti-Christ (20,27)
 - 3. Individuals who deny Christ are "anti-Christ" (22-23)
 - 4. Anti-Christ seek to lead others astray (26)
 - C. John's Aside on the Importance of Truth for Fellowship and the Certainty of Eternal Life (24-25)
 - 1. If you follow the teachings of the apostles you will be in right standing with God
 - 2. Eternal life is a promise of God for all who believe.
- VIII. Fellowship and Sonship (2:28-3:3)
 - A. Believers Who Continue in Fellowship with God will Not be Ashamed at His Coming (28)

- B. Only Someone Born of God is Capable of Being Righteous (29)
 - C. God's Love is Lavished on His Children (1)
 - D. Children of God will be Transformed at Christ's Coming (2)
 - E. The Return of the Lord Motivates Believers to Living Pure Lives (3)
- IX. The Nature of Sin and Its Impact on Fellowship (3:4-6)
- A. The Nature of Sin
 - 1. Sin is lawlessness (4)
 - 2. Christ died to take away our sins (5)
 - 3. In Christ is no sin (6a)
 - B. Sin and Its Impact on Fellowship (6b-10)
 - 1. Someone continuing in sin is not in fellowship with Christ (6a)
 - 2. Someone continuing in sin has not seen (literally, referring to the False-Teachers) Christ (6b)
 - 3. Someone continuing in sin does not really "know" Christ (6c)
- X. The Nature of Righteousness and Sin (3:7-10)
- A. Righteousness is of Christ (7-9)
 - 1. He who does what is right is righteous (7)
 - 2. One born of God will not continue in sin (6,9)
 - a. Because God's seed is in him (9a)
 - b. Because he has been born of God (9b)
 - B. Sin is of the Devil
 - 1. He who sins is of the Devil (8,10)
 - 2. The Devil sinned from the beginning (8)
 - 3. Christ came to destroy the devil's work (9)
- XI. The Nature of Hate and the Unbeliever (3:11-24)
- A. The Unbeliever Hates Righteousness (12)
 - B. The Unbeliever ("world") Will Hate Christians (13)
 - C. Hate is equivalent to Murder (15a)
 - D. The Unbeliever Continues to Hate and "Murder" (15b)
- XII. The Nature of Love and the Believer (3:11-24)
- A. Believers are to Love One Another (11,14)
 - B. Believers are to Love Like Christ Loved and Died (16)
 - C. Love for the Brethren is a Basis for Assurance (19-20)
 - D. Those Walking in Fellowship with Christ Exercise Love (21-24)
- XIII. Discerning the Spirits of Anti-Christ (4:1-6)
- A. Acknowledging Jesus is Fully God (Christ) and Fully Man (come in the flesh) confirms a spirit to be from God (1-2)
 - B. Denying that Jesus is from God indicates that the spirit is not from God (3)
 - C. Those who are children of God listen to God's apostles and their teaching (4-6)

- XIV. The Nature of Love and the Believer Continued (4:7-5:5)
 - A. True love is sourced in God Himself (7-8)
 - B. The sending of Christ is an example of God's true love (9-10)
 - C. When believers love others, God's love is made complete in them (11-12)
 - D. Believers must rely on God's love to live (13-16)
 - E. Believers who live a life characterized by love need not fear at the day of judgment (17-18)
 - F. Love for God necessitates love for others (19-21)
 - G. The Love of God is manifested in obedience to his commands (5:1-5)

- XV. The Nature of Jesus Christ and Its Relationship to Eternal Life (5:6-9)
 - A. The Nature of Jesus Christ (6-9)
 - 1. Jesus is fully God (6-8)
 - 2. Jesus is fully man (6-8)
 - B. The Truth of Jesus Christ and its Relationship to Eternal Life (10-13)
 - 1. Those who accept this truth have eternal life (11, 12a)
 - 2. Those who reject this truth calls God a liar (10b)
 - 3. Those who reject this truth do not have eternal life (12b)
 - 4. One can have assurance of eternal life if they have believed in Jesus Christ (13)

- XVI. The Nature of Sonship (5:14-21)
 - A. A Son of God has assurance in prayer that God will answer them (14-15)
 - B. A Son of God should pray for other believers (16-17)
 - C. A Son of God does not continue in sin (18a)
 - D. A Son of God is protected from the evil one (18b-19)
 - E. A Son of God has understanding (20a)
 - F. A Son of God can know God (20b)
 - G. A Son of God should avoid idols (21)

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