

‘EXPERIENCING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD’ ACCORDING TO 1 JOHN 1:5-2:28: DEALING WITH THE CHANGE IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

From the First Epistle of John it is evident that the constitution of ‘fellowship’ (κοινωνία) between God and ‘the children of God’ is closely related with a lifestyle related to the three attributes of God recited in the Epistle (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5; [ὁ θεός] δίκαιός ἐστίν, 2:29 and ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, 4:8). This article contemplates the ‘change in socio-religious behaviour’ relating to the attribute of ‘God is Light’ as stated in 1:5.

Following the emphatic statement in 1:5, the Elder discusses some conditions for having fellowship with God (1:6-2:28). Grounded in the nature of God as light (1:5), these conditions are contrasted with the conduct of the author’s opponents and are implemented through the Holy Spirit. It comprises: (1) the renounce of sin; (2) the exhortation to obedience; (3) the exhortation to reject worldliness; and (4) the exhortation to mutual abidance.

1. Introduction

Interest in spirituality is a global phenomenon.¹ It occurs, as a matter of fact, in most religions. In Christianity, the interest in spirituality is a growing tendency and one of the major reasons for the phenomenal growth in the Pentecostal and Charismatic church traditions.² Although different kinds of spiritualities can be defined, the approach in this article will focus, from a Christian perspective, on the ‘experience of fellowship with God’ as depicted in 1 John 1:5-2:28. This is due to the four occurrences of the noun ‘fellowship’³ (κοινωνία; 1 John 1:3bis, 6, 7), already as early as the *pro-oemium* (1:3bis) and at the beginning (1:6, 7) of the first section (1:5-2:28) of the first epistle of John. The noun ‘fellowship’ is used by the Elder⁴ to describe this close relationship. It is a richly significant theological term based on the adjective meaning ‘common’ (κοινός), denoting the active participation or sharing in what one has in common with others (Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:27). As used in the context of 1 John it can probably have a multiplicity of meanings, which can refer to ‘live in communion with,’ ‘be in a right relationship with,’ ‘be part of the family of God,’ or ‘share the same life’ (cf. Johnson 1993:29; Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:27).⁵ The nature of what is mutually shared moulds the character of the group.

To encourage and advance this Christian fellowship in the Johannine community, the Elder emphasizes its vital vertical aspect: ‘and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (1:3). Fellowship with God then is dependent on the fellowship with one another and contrariwise (cf. Painter 2002:128; also Rusam 1993:182)⁶. Each of these two aspects reflects, influences and constitutes the other. By using the noun *κοινωνία* in a chiasmic pattern (in 1:3, 6, 7)⁷, the Elder renders the lens through which 1 John has to be read and to be understood.

Therefore, the approach of this article is not a matter of solving a formulated and defined problem, but rather to make a new contribution in investigating the concept of ‘having or experiencing fellowship with God’; to formulate briefly what it comprises and to concentrate especially how it can be accomplished through a change in socio-religious behaviour according to 1 John 1:5-2:28. A second contribution is to investigate this ‘fellowship with God’ and ‘change in behaviour’ from the perception of the *familia Dei* which constitutes for the Elder his symbolic narrative in which he describes how the behaviour of his adherents must feature and their fellowship be experienced. A third contribution will be to interpret the two above mentioned statements from, and relate it to, the metaphorical indication of God as ‘Light’ (1:5). In order to achieve this, methodologically, a socio-rhetorical⁸ investigation of 1 John 1:5-2:28 will be conducted.

Therefore, inner-textually, the selected text (1:5-2:28) will be divided into sensible sub-sections which will be investigated individually. Such an investigation will be conducted from the Elder’s symbolic narrative (the ideological texture in the epistle), the *familia Dei*, and is presented in this epistle in contrast to the conduct of the Elder’s opponents (the socio-religious texture in the epistle). In this symbolic narrative the focus contemplates on the allusion to ‘God is Light’⁹ as stated in 1:5a and its implications for the children of God *to walk in the light* as a prerequisite for the experience of fellowship (sacred texture).¹⁰ In this article it will be pointed out that such an experience demands a change in socio-religious behaviour which the Elder spells out in terms of four ethic-and-theologically combined conditions.

2. Experiencing fellowship in the *familia dei*

Already in chapter 1 the Elder portrays this Christian life of fellowship¹¹ in the Johannine community as existence in a family (Van der Merwe 2005:

443f; also Rusam 1993:105ff; Van der Watt 1999:494ff; cf. also Dodd 1953:65ff), where God is the Father (3:1,) in the family (*familia Dei*), Jesus is his Son (Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:15), believers are the children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ, 3:1) and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:2f), which constitutes the presence of God and executes his involvement in the *familia Dei*.

Such family life has to be understood in the light of first-century Mediterranean group life. It is generally accepted by scholars who work social-scientifically that first-century Mediterranean people were not individualistic, but had a ‘dyadic’ or group-oriented personality. For people of that time and place, the basic, most elementary unit of social analysis, is not the individual person but the dyad, a person in relation with and connected to at least one other social unit, in particular, the family (Malina-Neyrey 1993:72-3; Esler 2002:151). Wilson (1996:2; also cf. Kloppenborg 1996:16-7) takes it even further by noting that all the associations of the Graeco-Roman world (synagogues, households, schools of philosophy, collegiums, guilds, mystery cults, etc.) were ‘voluntary associations’. Many associations were organized in a manner that both reflected and reinforced the existing social order, for example family or household cults (Wilson 1996:2). Kloppenborg (1996:16) reinforces such an idea by asserting that ‘voluntary associations represented a cultural institution integral to Hellenistic and Roman society where they played a significant role in mediating various kinds of social exchange’.

Therefore, it would seem most appropriate, according to Kloppenborg (1996:26), to distinguish voluntary associations on the basis of their respective membership bases rather than on the basis of their ostensible functions. For him, three groups could be distinguished: (1) those associated with a household; (2) those formed around a common trade (and civic locale), and (3) those formed around the cult of a deity. In the case the Johannine community, as it is for any Christian group, all the members are associated around the person and following of Jesus, acknowledged not only as God, but also the patron of the association.

Harland (2003:179), influenced by Judge, reflects more specifically on the position of Christianity in its formative years in the sense that Christianity did not live in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of the Graeco-Roman society; rather, once established in the polis of Roman Empire, the Christian group ‘belongs inevitably, as a social phenomenon, to the Hellenistic republics [i.e., *poleis*]. Its thinking and behaviour naturally reflect the

social institutions of these states'.¹² But despite all the similarities shared by these groups or associations, there were differences – in ideology, organization, membership, and purpose – among them (Wilson 1996:9). Since the dyadic individual is symptomatic and representative of some group, the responsibility for morality and deviance is not on the individual alone, but on the social body in which the individual is embedded (Malina-Neyrey 1993:76). Therefore, these people defined themselves exclusively in terms of these groups or associations in which they are embedded; their total self-awareness emphatically depends upon this group embeddedness.

Societies featuring dyadic personality provide their members with individual identities that are clearly defined which are, in the case of the Johannine community, legitimated by reference to their fellowship with God. This implies that certain values will prevail and certain virtues prescribed and certain vices proscribed. The result is a form of paraenesis – appeal is made to what is held in common and agreed to in terms of maxims, or commonly shared symbols (Malina-Neyrey 1993:79). Central to their socio-religious identity are group norms (Brown 2000:42-8). A norm in this context would have been a scale of values which defines a variety of acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviour by members of the group. Norms co-ordinate and regulate behaviour and cover issues such as ideologies, traditions, and mores. They assist members to act appropriately in new and ambiguous situations (Esler 2000:160; Brown 2000:251). In the case of the Johannine community the Elder explicates some norms, which relate to their identity and which distinguish them from other groups, to which they ought to live. Obedience to these norms constitutes the mutual and corporate fellowship. This he defines in terms of family life which tended to be the main group in these group-oriented Mediterranean societies.

This spiritual family transcends, existentially and ethically, the physical family to which a person belongs. This implies that that person exists in a different mode of existence on earth – already possessing eternal life. Supreme loyalty is owed to this spiritual family. When a person accepts this new way of life, new rules and new values replace previous traditions, rules and values. Birth from God (5:1, 18) is essential, for the child of God has to take on the same life as the Father, which must be evident in the conduct of the family. Christian Family life then implies specific ethical and religious conduct that relate to the attributes of God (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5; [ὁ θεός] δίκαιός ἐστίν, 2:29 and ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, 4:8, 16) who is depicted by the Elder as the head (Father) of this family, as

spelled out in 1 John.

In order to comprehend the necessity and content of this change in socio-religious behaviour it requires an understanding of the depiction of God in 1:5a. Here the Elder proclaims that ‘God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.’ This positive proclamation that ‘God is light,’ in the protasis of the verse, is a metaphorical statement of God’s nature in relation to his children (cf. Johnson 1993:28; also Bultmann 1973:16; Strecker 1996:25).¹³

Due to the qualitative differences between the earthly and the divine, the divine can only be described in earthly terms with reference to earthly associations and categories. Hence, if the Elder wants to speak about God he does it by means of metaphors. Although human concepts are used, reference is made to divine reality. Thus when the Elder refers to God as ‘light,’ this surface¹⁴ metaphor does not create the reality of light, but aims to describe that reality (Van der Watt 2000:23).¹⁵ Ordinary words only function analogically¹⁶ and do not fully cover all the aspects of the heavenly reality. This implies that metaphoric allows for gradual differences within the phenomena which are described as metaphors (Van der Watt 2000:24).

In order to understand the metaphor in 1:5a, cognizance can be taken of what Gräbe says about metaphors. She (1992:288) points out that normally, uniform explanations are given to lexicalized expressions. But actually, first impressions are important and generally known associations should be given preference. Also the context is of major importance in this regard. Hence, according to the first impression of light, from the immediate literary context and symbolic narrative (*familia Dei*), it can be deduced that the metaphor used in 1:5 reflects God’s *enlightenment*¹⁷ (Hiebert 1988:331; cf. also Krimmer 1989:26) and *holiness*. Hiebert (1988:331) points out that just as light reveals and purifies, so, by His very nature, God illuminates and sanctifies those who come to Him. Whatever symbolic associations this metaphoric designation may include, it definitely involves an ethical perceptive (Bruce 1970:41; Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:32) as spelled out in 1:6-2:17 and religious and confessional perpectives as spelled out in 2:18-28 which complement the ethical perceptive.

The Elder reinforces the concept of the preceding positively-stated clause (God is light - ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν) by adding a negative statement in the apodosis of the verse, opposite the preceding clause (ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν

οὐδεμία). This clause serves to emphasize that the proposal, ‘God is light,’¹⁸ is absolute, without any exception. In the Greek text two negative forms (οὐκ ... οὐδεμία) are used here, which reinforce each other, thus expressing an emphatic negation (Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:32). For the Elder then, ‘darkness’ (σκοτία) is not merely the absence of light; metaphorically it has a secular-moral quality reflecting the absence of salvation and of God, standing in direct antithesis to all that characterizes God as ‘light.’ For him ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ represent two separate and distinct realms in opposition to each other. God and his children constitute the one realm; Satan and his followers (the world) the other (cf. Hiebert 1988:331f).

The statement ‘God is light’ thus carries with it an inevitable sacred-moral challenge: his children must walk (περιπατεῖν) in the light due to his (God’s) nature; ‘ought to walk just as he [Jesus] walked.’ To live in the light keeps the children of God in the *familia Dei* in fellowship with the Father, his Son, the Spirit and fellow brothers (and sisters, 4:13-21).¹⁹ The experience of such fellowship will now be discussed.

3. ‘Fellowship with God’ comprises

While it is faith in the apostolic proclamation concerning Jesus that brings the adherents of the Elder into Christian fellowship, if the sense of ‘fellowship’ is common participation in something, then that something in this context would appear to be eternal life. ‘Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son’ (1:3b), and that which is shared is ‘the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us’ (1:2) in the person of the Son. The immediate context then refers to eternal life as the medium and sphere of the experience of this fellowship. Hence, the adherents of the Elder share in the life of God. But this fellowship, according to the context of 1:5-2:28, can be broken down in terms of: to experience the love of God (2:5); to experience the forgiveness of God (1:9); to know God (2:3; also cf. 2:20); to know the truth (2:21); and to experience the abidance of God, the Son and the Spirit (2:14, 24, 27; cf. 2:28) in the believer.

4. ‘Fellowship with God’ demands a change in socio-religious behaviour

The Elder addresses his adherents as people who have already ‘been born of God’ or alternatively spoken ‘came to faith in Christ’. Therefore, they, as God’s children, have to behave in accordance with specific sacred-

ethical conduct (rules and values) of the *familia Dei* into which they are born. This has been determined by God, their Father. Therefore, the Elder insists upon a correspondence between internal state (to be ‘in Him’, 1:5) and external behaviour (to ‘abide in Him’, 1:6). The ἀγγελία correlates to ἐντολή (Kenney 2000b:21). Through walking in the light, the children of God, individually and corporately, will experience the presence, reality and the involvement of God in their lives.

The conditions, spelled out in 1:6-2:28, to constitute communion between God and believers and which complement one another, will now be discussed.

4.1 The first condition for having fellowship with God: Renounce sin (1:6-2:2)

In the sub-section 1:6-2:2, the Elder describes how sin²⁰ hampers fellowship in the *familia Dei* and alternatively provides the corrective (cf. Culpepper 1998:257). Three tests are laid down by him in the form of false claims introduced by the conditional clause ‘if we say’ (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι, 6a, 8a, 10a) in the protasis of these verses. Each of these three tests consists of two parts: the first positive and the second negative (cf. Bruce 1970:42).²¹ The first part contains a claim, the second a condemnation with a negative consequence. In the first two tests the correctives (introduced by a conditional particle ἐὰν) are supplied in verses 7 and 9. In the third test (also ἐὰν, 2:1f) the Elder advances to a higher level. Instead of supplying another corrective, he moves over to the provision made to address the problem of sin.²²

The following is a tabled synopsis of the structure of 1:6-2:2.

	CLAIM	CONDEMNATION	CONSEQUENCE	CORRECTIVE/PROVISION	
1:6-7	Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι <u>κοινωνίαν</u> ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατοῦμεν <i>Denying the seriousness of sin</i>	ψευδόμεθα	καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν	ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτί περιπατοῦμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί	<u>κοινωνίαν</u> ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ <u>καθαρίζει</u> ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης <u>ἁμαρτίας</u> .
1:8-9	Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν <i>Denying of human sinfulness</i>	ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν	καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμῖν	ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν	πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφή ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ <u>καθαρίσῃ</u> ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης <u>ἀδικίας</u>
1:10-	ἐὰν εἴπωμεν	ψεύστην	καὶ ὁ	... ταῦτα γράφω	... παράκλητον

2:2	ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρ- τήκαμεν Denying the practice of sin	ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν	λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν	ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. Καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη	ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον καὶ αὐτὸς ἴλασμός ἔστιν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ...
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In this section the Elder starts the protasis of verses 6, 8 and 10 with ‘expectational’ *claims*:²³ ‘If we say that...’ (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ...). The *first* claim in verse 6 marks a clear contradiction between the claim (κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ) and the conduct maintained (ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν). The statement ‘that we have fellowship with Him’ claims that they have continuing fellowship with God, who is light. Contrary to this claim stands a course of conduct, ‘and yet walk in the darkness.’

The verb ‘walk’ (περιπατῶμεν) is a common figure of speech to denote moral conduct; it marks a transition from the literal sense of the word to denote one’s way of life (Bruce 1970:42; Danker 2000:803; Louw & Nida 1988:509; Ebel 1978:945). It is used here in a semitic sense of ‘to pursue a way of life’, ‘to live’ or ‘to conduct oneself’ (Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:33). It characterizes a mode of existence (Bultmann 1973:17). The present subjunctive mode (περιπατῶμεν) denotes that it is a continuous action (Hiebert 1988:332) of living in sin.

Verses 8 and 10 relate to verse 6 in the sense that it is equally as wrong to deny, as a way of conduct, both human sinfulness (v 8) and the practice of sin (1:10) in one’s life. Such claims also hinder fellowship with both God and other believers in the family (cf. 1:6, 7). Such a person walks in darkness. It is not up to the children of God in the *familia Dei* to determine the paradigm and model of the ‘walk’; it is determined by God’s nature, ‘as He himself is in the light.’ This expression contemplates the contrast between God who ‘is in the light’ as the natural realm of his being, and those seeking fellowship with Him who must continuously endeavour to ‘walk in the light’. The closer the fellowship with God and with those who walk with God, the more aware believers will be of sin in their lives (Johnson 1993:31).

In the apodosis of these verses (1:6, 8) the Elder pronounced a *condemnation* on this conduct by stating that ‘we lie’ (ψευδόμεθα / ἐαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν). In his condemnation of these claims the Elder announces a verdict. In verses 6 and 8 he describes it as falsehood on man’s part namely: ‘we are not practicing the truth’ (1:6); and ‘the truth has no place in us’ (1:8). But in verse 10 the Elder defines the condemnation even

stronger, with reference to *God*. The claim to be without sin suggests falsehood on God's part; it 'makes him out to be a liar.' This proves that they do not have God's word abiding in them.

In all three cases (see 1:7, 9; 2:1f) the Elder raises the question of *forgiveness*, and in so doing replies once more to the heretical claim to be free from sin. In each of the three cases the Elder's answer is introduced by an adversative εἰν ('if'; here καὶ εἰν 'but if'). Should believers walk in the light (1:7) or confess their sins (1:9) they will have fellowship with one another (1:7b) and will be cleansed from all sin (1:7b, 9b) by the blood of Jesus (1:7b) and because God is faithful and just (1:9b).

In 2:1, 2 this passage reaches a climax where the Elder twice deals positively with the problem of sin: if anyone *should* sin, God has made provision for this – (1) in the presence of God the Father, his children have a consummate intercessor, an *Advocate* (2:1, Jesus Christ the righteous)²⁴ and (2) Jesus Christ is the consummate propitiation, the *atonement sacrifice* for the sins of the world. God's children are always under way and never stand before God as a finished product, but are always dependent on forgiveness (cf. Bultmann 1973:21).

Hence, according to this condition communion with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: to walk in the light as He is in the light (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ φωτί, 1:7); and - *constituted* through: the acknowledgement-confession-forgiveness of sin; and the role and function of Jesus Christ as *advocate* (παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον, 2:1) and *atonement sacrifice* (καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν..., 2:2).

4.2 The second condition for having fellowship with God: Be obedient (2:3-11)

The stylistic structure (a trio of false claims) in this sub-section, in several aspects is parallel to that of the preceding sub-section. Verse 3 states the theme that to know God means to follow his commandment. In verses 4, 6, and 9, three propositions of the false teachers are quoted, similarly to 1:6, 8, and 10, but now introduced by the phrase 'he who says' (ὁ λέγων). This trio of false claims relate to being in a right relationship with God/Christ:²⁵ *knowing* God/Christ (2:4); *abiding* in God/Christ (2:6); *being* in the light (2:9). All the answers have in common: to emphasize 'the observance of the commandment of love' (cf. Johnson 1996:39). A tabled analysis of 2:3-

11 where the Elder spells out the condition of being obedient is given below:

AFFIRMATION	TEST	RESULT
3 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. 4 ὁ λέγων ... ὅτι <u>ἔγνοκα αὐτόν</u>	καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν,	ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἐστὶν
5 ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν.		
6 ὁ λέγων ... ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν	ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν	[... ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν]
7 Ἀγαπητοί, οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. 8 πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει		
9 ὁ λέγων ... ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι	καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν	ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι
10 ὁ ... ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ .. μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐστὶν. 11 ὁ δὲ μισῶν... τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.		

From this analysis it is clear that the progress of the Elder's thoughts in this passage is complicated, though carefully structured and developed. The vocabulary and literary form of this sub-section divide it into three units (2:3-5, 6-8, 9-11)²⁶ to form three acts of behaviour in the development of the major theme, 'the observance of the commandment of love.' This passage reaches a climax in verse 10 (ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει).²⁷ The three units will now be discussed.

4.2.1 Adherence of the commands proves knowledge of God/Christ (2:3-5)

This unit starts from the conviction that the behaviour of God's Children and their invisible relation to God are closely linked (cf. the preposition 'in' [ἐν]). Conclusions can be drawn from the one concerning the other. Accordingly, when they keep God's commandments it can be inferred that they know God which is the issue in 2:3-5.

The verb ‘to know’ (γινώσκειν) occurs four times in these verses. Elsewhere in 1 John, ‘to know God’ means to have ‘fellowship with God’ (1:6; cf. John 17:3) and ‘to walk in the light’ (1:7; 2:9). This unit (2:3-5) highlights ‘obedience to the commandments’ as a criterion for fellowship with God the Father.²⁸ From verse 3 it is apparent that observing the Father’s commandments is a criterion of knowledge of Him. Knowledge and observance are correlative - in fact, obedience is the peak of the believer’s knowledge of God (Ἔγνωκα αὐτόν) and love for Him (τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπῶμεν, cf. 5:2, 3). Obedience therefore constitutes fellowship with God - to be ‘in Him’ (2:5, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν; cf. also 2:6, ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν). Also in 2:5, the Elder emphasizes that the character of God will be displayed in those who ‘abide in Him’ (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν). Hence, according to this unit communion with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: knowing him (ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, 2:3a, 4a), being in him (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, 2:5c); and
- *constituted* through: keeping his commandments (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, 2:3b, 4b), keeping his word (τηρῆ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, 2:5a).

These expressions and constitution of communion with God is concisely phrased in the next unit (2:6) as ‘to walk as he [Jesus] walked’; it moves God’s children to imitate God’s Son (1:3).

4.2.2 To walk as Jesus walked proves to ‘abide in him’ (2:6-8)

The imitation of Jesus is placed in this unit as the requisite and guarantee for communion with God the Father. Verse 6 extends the thought: those who abide in Him, has within themselves the sense of duty that moves them to imitate Jesus. This is expressed in terms of ‘walk’ (περιπατεῖν, 2:6). This is the obligation, therefore, laid personally upon every Christian believer (note the force of αὐτός, ‘he *himself*’): not only to obey God’s orders, his word (2:4–5), but also to follow the example of his Son (2:6). God’s children cannot claim to abide in him unless they behave like him. As Jesus lived (περιεπάτησεν, aorist), so must Christians themselves live.²⁹

In the Johannine writings, the subordinating comparative particle, ‘as’ (καθώς), relates to the life of Christ as both a model to be imitated, and as the means for that imitation to become a possibility (cf. 3:2; 4:17; John 13:15, 34; 15:12, 17; also Malatesta 1978:134). Therefore, Jesus’ conduct is presented as the source and example of all Christian obedience to the

Father's commandments, of the indwelling of truth and God's love in believers and consequently of having fellowship with him and the Father. Hence, according to this unit, communion with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: to remain in him (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, 2:6a); and
- *constituted* through: the imitation of Jesus (ὁφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν, 2:6bc).

In the next two verses this imitation of Jesus is defined more closely in the references to the 'old' and 'new' commandment. The reference to the 'old' commandment is utilized by the Elder to understand the relation between the 'new' commandment and 'imitation' of Jesus. In 2:8a he states that he is writing to them a new commandment that is true in Christ and in the readers. In the gift of the new commandment the life-giving revelation (ἀληθὲς) within (ἐν ... ἐν) is (ἐστίν; see ἤδη φαίνει in 2:8) to transform the entire person (αὐτῷ ... ὑμῖν). This is a reality in believers (ἐν αὐτῷ) because it was first realized and continues to realize in Jesus (ἐν ὑμῖν). By fulfilling the commandment in the *familia Dei*, the children of God will experience Christ, who is present and active through it, and also the Father, the ultimate source of it (Malatesta 1978:147).

This unit (2:8b) demonstrates how this law (which is both 'old' and 'new' in character) has been realized by Jesus. In the following unit the Elder turns to the content of the commandment. He now describes how love ought to realize (through Christ) in the experience and conduct of the Christian (2:9–11) as prove of living 'in the light.'

4.2.3 To love one's brother is proof of living 'in the light' (2:9-11)

The consequence and development of verses 6-8 are reflected in 1 John 2:9-11 and it contains three antithetical statements (negative [2:9]-positive [2:10]-negative [2:11]). These verses explain that the major criterion for judging the presence of fellowship with God, expressed in terms of knowledge of God the Father and of abiding in Him, is the observance of his commandment, epitomized in the new commandment of brotherly love. Through loving one another within the *familia Dei* believers will mutually experience God's love. This presupposes the abiding in his light (1:5), which has been incarnated in his Son and also mediated by his commandment of brotherly love. The observance of this commandment is made possible by God's own love, which indwells believers and impels them to imitate Jesus his Son, by placing within believers what was given to Jesus, namely the revelation of his commandment. According to this

unit, fellowship with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: being in the light (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι, 2:9a); and
- *constituted* through: to love one's brother (ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτι μένει, 2:10a).

Hence, to experience communion with God (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει) is expressed in this unit in active love for others within the family. It can therefore be concluded that the three affirmations about *knowing God*, *abiding in him*, and *being in the light* (as He himself is in the light, 1:7), are parallel versions of a single requirement that needs to be complied with, to be in a right relationship with the Father through the Son.

4.3 The third condition for having fellowship with God: Doing God's will (2:12-17)

Sub-section 2:12-28 consists of three units (12-14, 15-17, 18-28) which, although distinct from one another, are nonetheless closely interrelated.³⁰ In this sub-section the Elder requests his adherents' strengthening of their faith, by referring to seven *reassurances* (2:12-14; see also 2:20, οἴδατε) which are stated in the perfect indicative (ἀφέωντα, ἐγνώκατε, νενικήκατε), four *general truths* (2:17, 20, 23) stated in the present indicative (μένει bis, ἔχετε, ἔχει), and four *exhortations* (2:15, 24, 27, 28) stated in the present imperative (ἀγαπάτε, μενέτω, μένετε bis). Then there are three *promises* (2:24, 25, 28): the 1st is stated in the future indicative (μενεῖτε), the 2nd is stated as a promise (ἦν αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο), and the 3rd with the future temporal particle (ἐὰν).

The following is a tabled synopsis of 2:12-28 to point out the above analysis.

REASSURANCES ³¹	TRUTHS	EXHORTATION S	PROMISSES
- ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (2:12)	- ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ <u>μένει</u> εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (2:17)	<u>Μὴ ἀγαπάτε</u> τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (2:15) ...	
- ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (2:13, 14)	- ὑμεῖς χρίσμα <u>ἔχετε</u> ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ οἴδατε πάντες (2:20)		
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα (2:14)			<u>ὁ δὲ ποιῶν</u> τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ <u>μένει</u> εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (2:17)

- <u>ὅτι</u> ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν <u>μένει</u> καὶ <u>νευκῆκατε</u> τὸν πονηρὸν (2:13, 14)	- πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα <u>ἔχει</u> , ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα <u>ἔχει</u> (2:23)	- ὑμεῖς ὁ ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἐν ὑμῖν <u>μενέτω</u> (2:24)	- <u>ἐὰν</u> ἐν ὑμῖν <u>μείνη</u> ὁ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἠκούσατε, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ <u>μενεῖτε</u> (2:24)
- <u>ὅτι</u> ... <u>οἴδατε</u> τὴν ἀλήθειαν (2:21)	- ὑμεῖς τὸ χρίσμα ὃ <u>ἐλάβετε</u> ἀπ' αὐτοῦ <u>μένει</u> ἐν ὑμῖν (2:27)	<u>μένετε</u> ἐν αὐτῷ (2:27, 28)	<u>ἵνα</u> ἐὰν φανερωθῇ σχῶμεν παρρησίαν καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνοθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ (2:28)

The reassurances describe the character of those inside the *familia Dei*, as opposed to those outside, who falsely lay claim to faith. The Elder reminds them of their inner and personal experience of the effects of the Christian faith in their lives. They already experience fellowship with God. The general truths and promises are complementary to these reassurances. This is to strengthen them spiritually and has a rhetorical function to motivate them to fulfil the exhortations that are spelled out in this section. It contains a description of the life of those who live in the light, which is very different from the description of the life of the false teachers who live in darkness and who are not part of this group.

The exhortations in 2:15, 24 and 27 (28) are stated by the Elder as conditions for enjoying communion with God. The first exhortation (2:15, Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ... ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ...) will now be discussed. Because the conditions in verses 24, 27 and 28 relate, occur in the same unit and complement each other, they will be discussed concurrently as the fourth condition.

The third condition for having fellowship with God: Do not love the world or the things in the world, ... rather do the will of God (2:12-17)

From the previous table synopsis it is evident that verses 12-14 (also 2:21) are reassurances to strengthen the 'children of God' spiritually and to induce them not to love the world. In verses 15-17 three contrasts are spelled out why worldliness has to be rejected:

Exhortation	The world	God (Father)
15 <u>Μὴ</u> ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.	<u>ἐὰν</u> τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον,	<u>οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ.</u>
16 <u>ὅτι</u> πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου,	<u>ἐκ</u> τοῦ κόσμου <u>ἐστίν.</u>	<u>οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ'</u>

	17 καὶ ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ,	ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.
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The *first contrast* (2:15) is between the love for the world and what is in it, and love for the Father. The community is exhorted not to love the world or the things in the world (2:15f). They must avoid the ‘things in the world’ that are at variance with the love of the Father in the *familia Dei*, because the world has no place for the love of the Father (2:15). The Elder wishes to show that these two loves are mutually exclusive. Those that are attached to the ‘things in the world’ cannot receive the Father’s love, share that love with others, or love the Father in return.³²

The *second contrast* (2:16), contrasts the origins of these internal attitudes. What is *in* the world, what represents the fallen human nature, is also *from* the world. Therefore, worldliness must be rejected. This implies that which is *in* God’s children, namely, the love which reaches inwards towards the Father and outwards towards other family members, is *from* the Father.

In the *third contrast* (in duration) the Elder refers to the impermanent ‘things in the world’ as opposed to the permanency of life for those who ‘do the will of God’ (2:17). The emphasis in this section is placed on the obligation μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε (2:15, do not love) ... ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (2:17, do the will of God) (also Strecker 1996:54). ‘Doing the will of God’ should be seen in relation to keeping his commands (2:3, 4; 3:22; 5:2, 3) and his word (2:5),³³ which comprises acting according to the truth (see 1:6) and living a ‘sinless life’ (3:6, 9) in imitation of Jesus (2:6; 3:3, 7). To do God’s will is to imitate Jesus to experience God through his Spirit (see the Fourth Gospel on the Paraclete) and to share in the victory won over the world by his obedience (John 14:30f; 16:33).

This unit reaches a climax when a promise is given to those ‘who do the will of God’ (2:17): they ‘will live forever.’ This eternal life (life of God), promised to believers, is conceived in terms of their remaining not just forever, but remaining in the Son and the Father (2:24, 25). It has both a chronological and quality meaning (Bultmann 1973:40). Obedience to the will of God in conformity with and through Jesus’ own obedience will have the same effect in believers as in him: permanent communion with the Father. To love God means to do the Father’s will and to share in his life.

Hence, according to this unit communion with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: to live forever (μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 2:17); and
- *constituted* through: not to love the world ... to do the will of God (Μὴ ἀγαπατέ τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ... δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ).

4.4 The fourth condition for having fellowship with God: (2:18-28): Mutual Abidance

This unit contains probably the greatest concentration and variety of the experience of fellowship³⁴ to be found in any part of 1 John. All of these expressions are construed with the characteristic Johannine verb ‘to abide’ (μένειν),³⁵ a feature which highlights the parenetic tone of this unit (Malatesta 1978:193). The positions that μένει occupies serve to blend the various facets which pervade the entire unit.³⁶ A disposition of 2:12-28 reveals that the verb μένει is the predominant theme, for it climaxes each of the three units (2:14, 17; 27, 28). It occurs once in 2:12-14 and once in 2:15-17, but seven times in 2:18-28.

ABIDES IN YOU	ABIDE IN HIM
- καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει (2:14) - ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ³⁷ (2:17)	
- εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενήκεισαν ἂν μεθ’ ἡμῶν (2:19)	
- ὑμεῖς ὃ ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ἐν ὑμῖν μενέτω (2:24)	
- ἐὰν ἐν ὑμῖν μείνη ὃ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἠκούσατε, .. (2:24)	... καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μενεῖτε (2:24)
- καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ χρίσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, μένει ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε ἵνα τις διδάσκη ὑμᾶς, (2:27)	... ἀλλ’ ὡς τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων ... μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ. (2:27)
	- μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ (2:28)

The instruction in this unit is aimed against the false teaching of the antichrists (ἀντίχριστοι, 2:18bis, 22) who are endangering the existence and fellowship of the community. To crack down on this false teaching of the outsiders, the Elder refers to the abiding of the word (2:24, ὃ ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς), and the abiding of the Spirit (2:27, τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα)³⁸ in the children of God. From 2:24 it is evident that it is the *familia Dei* that should hold on to the message from the beginning and thus enjoy that reciprocal

fellowship with the Son and the Father³⁹ (see also 1:3). If the *word abides in them*, then the Father and the Son will abide in them.⁴⁰ Thus, the abidance of the word⁴¹ (and knowledge) in believers is a prerequisite and guarantee (Strecker 1996:68) for the abiding of the Father and Son in them.⁴² This is expressed here both in the present imperative (μηνέτω) and in the future indicative (μηνείτε). Holding fast to the tradition on which the community was established is not something that happens once for all time; it does not lead to a perfection of faith. It must constantly recall this basis, and requires admonition so that it will continually realize anew what has been promised to it. The promise then of eternal life (2:25) expresses the confidence that abiding in the Father and in the Son will be perfected in the future (Strecker 1996:68f) when they will abide in the house of the Father.

But the Elder also speaks about the Holy Spirit within this context where the μένειν-motif, the reference to ‘abide in God’ and ‘God abides in us’ is prominent. The implications of the gift of the Holy Spirit focus strongly on the mutual ‘abiding in’ relationship between God (Christ)⁴³ and his children (cf. Coetzee 1981:60). Heise (1967:112f) pointed out that the verb μένειν (with the exception of 2:6 and 3:6) occurs only in the closest connection with references to the Holy Spirit, when it is used regarding the relationship between God (Christ) and his children.⁴⁴ Hence, the phrase ‘remain in’ (μένετε ἐν) expresses the most intimate relationship of ‘fellowship’ (κοινωνία) between God and the children of God. The statement that God abides in his children has a mysterious element; it creates an inner unity, an *unio mystica* (cf. Munzer 1978:224).

This mutual abidance is not only approved by the Spirit (4:13), but is also constituted by the Holy Spirit (3:24; 4:13). In this unit it is clear that the Spirit does not operate separate from, next to, or contradictory to the revelation⁴⁵ of God in Christ, the proclaimed word. The Spirit is the Spirit of the teaching from the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς). The truth (ἀληθεία) which they know, the teaching ‘about all things’ (περὶ πάντων) in which the Spirit instructs them, is nothing less than ‘what you have heard from the beginning’ (ὃ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἠκούσατε, 2:24) (Coetzee 1979:54).

Hence, the verb ‘abide’ (μένειν)⁴⁶ reflects this relationship between the Father, his Son and the children of God in the *familia Dei*. In this unit μένειν refers to a fully reciprocal experience. In this reciprocal use, of ‘abides in you’ (ὕμῖν μέινῃ) and ‘abide in Him’ (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ), the latter is not just another way of saying the former. That ‘we abide in him

and he in us,' (4:13) refers just as naturally to God's presence in his family, so that the evidence of the Spirit is a communal rather than an individual experience (see also 3:24).⁴⁷

After the analogy of the personal statement, the Elder uses 'abide in' for the expressions of the experience of divine life in God's children, for example God's Word (2:14); life (3:15); love (3:17); truth (2 John 2); anointing (2:27). God's children too abide in divine things, for example light (2:10); doctrine (2:14, 24; 2 John 9).⁴⁸

Hence, according to this unit communion with God is:

- *expressed* in terms of: you will abide in the Son and in the Father (ὕμεις ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μενεῖτε, 2:24); have knowledge (οἴδατε πάντες, 2:20) and ... know the truth (οἴδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 2:21); and

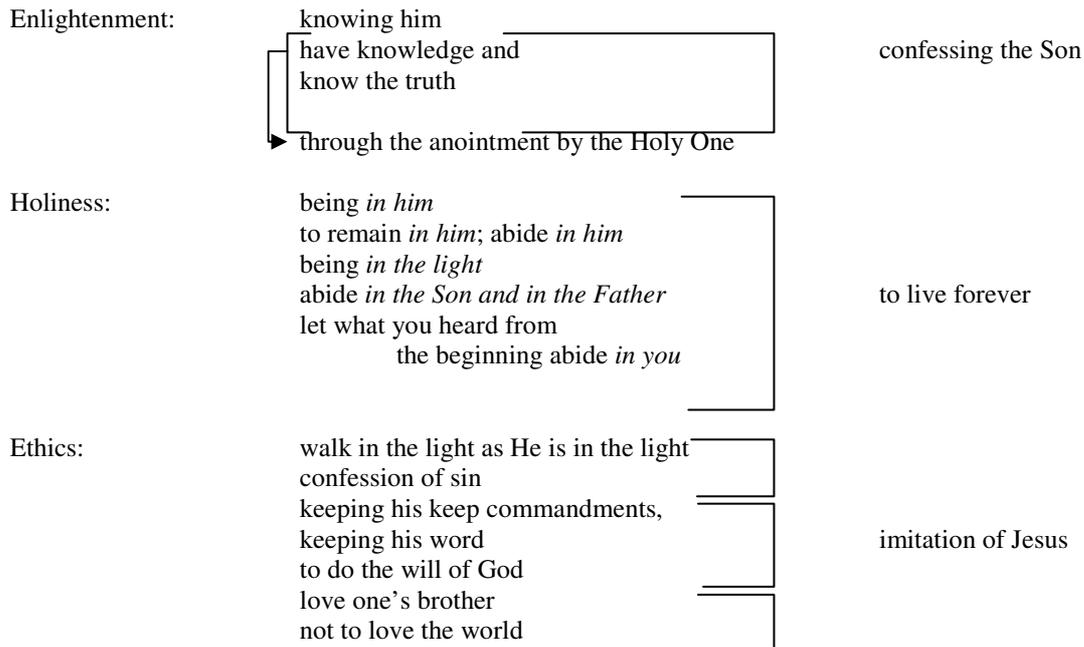
- *constituted* through: the anointment by the Holy One (ὕμεις χρίσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, 2:20); confessing the Son (ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν, 2:23); to let what you heard from the beginning abide in you (ὕμεις ὃ ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἐν ὑμῖν μενέτω, 2:24); abide in him (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ, 2:27, 28).

This unit, as well as the entire section, culminates with the eschatological reference in 2:28 that those who live in the light 'may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.'

5. 'Experience of fellowship with God' demands the change of socio-religious behavior

From this investigation it became evident that the identity and conduct of those inside the Johannine community are characterized differently from that of the outsiders. Their way of life, not only distinguished them from the outsiders, but also constituted the 'experience of having fellowship with God'. They had to live mutually according to certain sacred-ethical prescriptions prescribed by the Elder.

This κοινωνία is explained from the perspective of the statement that 'God is light' (1:5; also 7). The 'light' metaphor not only describes a facet of God's nature (*enlightenment, holiness and ethics*), but it also indicates the character of the conditions necessary for all who seek fellowship with Him. The following synopsis is deduced from the perspective of 'God is light' to explain how 'fellowship' is constituted and maintained in the *familia Dei*.



It became evident that the believer's fellowship with God is an intimate mutual relationship. It may be represented as a mutual interpenetration, which is more than moral quality. God's personality and the believer are never compromised. It is an experience that is not limited to time, as in mysticism or ecstasy, but is in its very nature a permanent position ('to abide'; 'to know'; 'to keep') as long as those insiders 'walk in the light' to form a *sanctorum communitas* (holy community).

Within the *familia Dei*, the τέκνα θεοῦ are free to choose between light (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5a) and darkness (σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία, 1:5b), obedience and disobedience (2:3, 4, τηρῶμεν ... μὴ τηρῶν), love and hate (2:10, 11, ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ... ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ). In order to help his adherents to make the right decision, the methodology used by the Elder in 1 John has both (1) an *explanatory function* and (2) a *rhetorical function*. The Elder uses the *reciprocal negative* (antithetical parallelism) to describe and to explain the commanding positive. The *rhetorical function* is to encourage his adherents to keep on living in the light, and to encourage those who were led astray to come back 'to live in the light' in order to experience fellowship. Therefore each sub-section builds up to and ends on a climax. In fact, the entire section (1:5-2:28) is a logical rhetorical building up to an eschatological climax:

- *Renounce sin*: Jesus is the paraclete (παράκλητος) and propitiation (ἱλασμός) for sin (2:1, 2)
- *Be obedient*: they will live in the light (2:10)
- *Doing God's will*: they will live forever (sharing God's life) (2:17)
- *Mutual abidance*: they may have confidence and not be put to shame before him *at his coming* (2:28)

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NOTES

¹ This is sensible not only from the huge number of books and articles published on spirituality as a concept, but also from the interest on tertiary level . Even in South Africa, a Spirituality Association of South Africa (SPIRASA) was established at Stellenbosch in 2004. At some universities in South Africa, quite a number of students have enrolled for graduate and postgraduate studies in spirituality. At the University of Pretoria the Faculty of Theology's theme for 2004 was 'Spirituality'.

² This statement does not negate the interest in spirituality also in the Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox or Reformed traditions.

- ³ See Van der Merwe (2006) for a more thorough discussion of the concept *κοινωνία*. See also Rusam 1993:214ff; Strecker 1996:20; Callahan 2005: 18, 22.
- ⁴ In this article it has been accepted, in agreement with the point of view of most scholars, that the three Johannine epistles were written by the same person, referred to in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 as the *πρεσβύτερος* (Brown 1997:398; Culpepper 1998:251; Kenney 2000b:12; Duling 2003:439; Thomas 2004:4; Callahan 2005:2). Therefore, in this document, the author will be referred to as ‘the Elder’.
- ⁵ The above understanding by Haas-De Jonge-Swellengrebel is supported by Danker and Louw-Nida. Danker (2000:552) defines it lexicologically as ‘close association involving mutual interests and sharing, communion, fellowship, close relationship’. Thus, according to Danker, in the context of 1:13, 6, 7 (ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), it would mean ‘to have fellowship with someone’. Louw & Nida (1988:446) semantically defines *κοινωνία* in this context as ‘an association involving close relations and involvement – “close association, fellowship”.’ Schattenmann (1975:644) attenuates it theologically to mean ‘to fellowship in faith’, but is correct that it does not refer to a mystical fusion with Christ and God.
- ⁶ Painter (2002:138) emphatically states that ‘It is fundamental to the message of 1 John that relationship (*koinōnia*) with God (the Father and the Son) is through the relationship (*koinōnia*) with one another: see 4:7-8, 11-12, 20-21; 5:1-3.’
- ⁷ 1:3 ... ἵνα καὶ (A) ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. καὶ (B) ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ... 1:6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι (B’) κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰ τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν· 7 Ἐὰν δὲ εἰ τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί, (A’) κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων.
- ⁸ The comprehensive work of Robbins (1996, *Exploring the texture of texts: a guide to socio-historical interpretation*) will be used in this regard.
- ⁹ Within scholarship two distinct and disparate views have developed concerning the message of 1 John. They have arisen as a consequence of two variant perceptions of the purpose of the epistle. The one comprises ‘salvation’ (τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον) and the other ‘fellowship’ (*κοινωνίαν*) (see Derickson 1993:89-105; cf. also Smalley 1984; Kenney 2000a). In fact they are complementary to one another. Both these themes are mentioned in the prologue of 1 John, where the author gives, as we may expect, a synopsis of his principal motifs. In this article the emphasis will fall on the fellowship perspective according to the first section (1:5-2:28) where God is referred to as: ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν (1:5). The other two major sections are

2:29-4:6 and 4:5-12. Compare Malatesta 1978, Von Wahlde 1990, Culpepper 1998, Kim 1998, Kenney 2000a and Painter 2002, who basically use the same structural division.

According to the following scholars is 'Walking in the Light as a Sign of Fellowship with God' the central theme of 1:5-2:11, (17), (28): Haas, de Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:14f; Bultmann (1973:15; Malatesta 1978:93; Schnackenburg 1992:70, 72; Strecker 1996:23; Edwards 1996:71. The unit, 2:18-28, has been added because it contains probably the greatest concentration and variety of the experience of fellowship to be found in any one sub-division of 1 John.

¹⁰ Johnson (1993:30) points out that 'Just as in the Sermon of the Mount, God's character is the pattern and model (Matt. 5:48: 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'), and just as Paul told the Philippians,' 'Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel' (Phil 1:27, RSV). So the Elder holds up a divine standard for human conduct.

¹¹ Alongside to 'have fellowship with God,' which is only found in 1:3 and 6, one of the commonest phrases is 'to be in God' (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, 2:5; 5:20) or 'to abide' (μένειν, 2:6, 24; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). This combination with the typical verb μένω is usually expanded (except in 2:6, 24) into a twofold or reciprocal formula ('we in God and God in us') or *vice versa*. Another expression of fellowship with God found only in 1 and 2 John is 'to have the Father' (τὸν πατέρα ἔχει) or 'the Son' (1 John 2:23; 5:12; 2 John 9). 'To know the Father' (ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα) comes down to the same thing (2:3 [cf. 2:5]; 2:13, 14 [cf. 1:3]). Believers are also indicated to be 'of God' (ἐστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:10; 4:4, 6; 5:18f). God also abides in believers by his Spirit that He has given us (μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν, 2:3; 3:24). See also Lieu 1991:31ff; Schnackenburg 1992:63f.

¹² Judge, E A 1960. *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century*. London: Tyndale Press.

¹³ Nuanced differences occur among scholars on the interpretation and understanding of the Elder's statement: ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν. According to Smalley (1984:20) it is 'a penetrating description of the being and nature of God: it means that he is absolute in his glory (the physical connotation of light), in his truth (the intellectual) and in his holiness (the moral).' Krimmer (1989:26; cf. also Schnackenburg 1992:77) sees this metaphoric reference as 'eine Seinsaussage und eine Handlungsbeschreibung Gottes'. For Bultmann (1973:16) it designates God's nature, and the sphere of the divine. Malatesta (1978:96ff) tries to relate the meaning to what the Bible says about the relation between God and light. Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel (1972:32) suggest a shift from metaphor to simile, 'God's being is like light.'

From a linguistic perspective, ὁ θεὸς (God) with the definite nominative article, is the subject; φῶς (light), without the article, is also nominative and subjective; therefore the two terms and subjects cannot be interchanged. The qualitative predicate noun, φῶς, is used in a qualitative sense (Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:31), to describe God as possessing the qualities of light. This is a reflection of God's nature. Therefore, φῶς should not be interpreted literally (Hiebert 1988:331).

The best way then to do justice to what is meant by using this metaphor by the Elder is to turn the entire process of interpretation around. One has to consider the context (1:6-2:28) following this statement in 1:5. The text discusses three moral conducts (do not sin, obey God's commandment, and do not love the world, but do the will of God). This becomes only possible through mutual abidance (living in the sphere of God). Thus, we can conclude that the light metaphor refers to God's nature (Bultmann 1973:16; Strecker 1996:25; Johnson 1993:28) and the sphere of the divine (as according to Bultmann 1973:16) with ethical implications for the 'children of God' (as according to the majority of scholars: Painter 2002:128; Hiebert, 1988:331; Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel, 1972:32; Bruce, 1970:41; and Whitacre, 1982:161). Thus God's nature demands a specific way of conduct within the sphere of the *familia Dei*.

The *Oxford Dictionary* (1984:1387) helps to understand what is meant by referring to God's nature in its definition of nature as: '(1) the essential qualities of a thing; the inherent and inseparable combination of properties essentially pertaining to anything and giving it its fundamental character, (2) The inherent and innate disposition or character of a person.'

¹⁴ 'A *surface metaphor* is a basic metaphor in which both the tenor and vehicle are given' (Van der Watt 2000:20).

¹⁵ Jordan (1974:234, 236) points out Aristotle's reference concerning the 'affective aspect of meaning' in relation to metaphors: 'Aristotle's concept of metaphor is essentially psychological in that it identifies semantic and structural characteristics, which affect reader and listener behaviour. ... The meaning ... is neither the denotation nor the referent but the mental experience which the word evokes in a listener.'

¹⁶ Aristotle pointed out the importance of *analogy* (ἀναλογία) in the functioning of metaphors (Aristotle *Poet.*21). Analogy is used here to identify *similarity* (congruency) between the tenor and the vehicle of this metaphor, which simultaneously contains and expresses the *difference* (incongruency) between the two (see Ricoeur 1978:148). That is why the two metaphorical elements, of ὁ θεὸς and φῶς, are not equal to one another, but are called 'analogically'.

¹⁷ Hiebert (1988:331) adds an intellectual perceptive.

- 18 See Stott (1964:70), Dodd (1953:201–205) and Malatesta (1978:99ff) for a discussion on the image of God as ‘light’.
- 19 The references μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ (God), κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν, ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν (God) and εἶναι ἐν are related (cf. Malatesta 1978; 27; Derickson 1993:97), though understood as describing aspects of ‘walking in the light’ and the believer’s relationship to the Father within the *familia Dei*. According to Derickson (1993:97) who studied the message of 1 John, ‘abiding in him’ (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ) should be understood in the Pauline sense of ‘walking in the Spirit.’ This is supported in part from the Johannine use of abiding in John 15. ‘Fellowship’ (κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν) should be understood naturally as expressing relationship or communion. ‘Knowing God’ is the result of walking with Him in fellowship.
- 20 Most of the references to sin are in the singular. This entails that it calls attention to the principle or fact of sin in human life (e.g. 1:8), rather than individual acts of sin.
- 21 This stylistic feature is important. It indicates the discourse structure of this whole section (Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel 1972:34).
- 22 These claims seem clearly to represent views advanced by the false teachers (Hiebert 1988:332; Culpepper 1998:257; Hurtado 2003:414).
- 23 Hiebert (1988:332) interprets all three the claims in 1:6, 8, 10 as ‘hypothetical.’ To interpret it as ‘expectational’ claims seems to be closer to the truth.
- 24 In the New Testament the noun παράκλητον is found only five times, all in the *corpus Johanneum* (John 14:16; cf. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). Whereas παράκλητος does not appear outside the Johannine writings, the idea which it conveys is embedded in primitive Christian teaching. Paul refers to the Spirit as the one who ‘intercedes for us’ (Rom 8:26, 27) and describes Jesus as the one ‘who is at he right hand of God, who also intercedes for us’ (Rom 8:34). Even in the Epistle to the Hebrews, advocacy forms part of Christ’s intercessory ministry as his people’s high priest (e.g. Heb 7:5). For its use and meaning in John’s Gospel, and for the difficulty of translating the term exactly, see Smalley (1978:228–33).
- 25 In this sub-section no explicit references to God or Christ occur. Even from the context it is not always clear to which person the personal pronouns or verbs refer.
- 26 In this sub-section (2:3-11), three central affirmations (ὁ λέγων, 2:4, 6, 9) occur, of which the first two legitimize the act of ‘obedience’: ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν (2:4a) and ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν (2:6a). In each case the validity of the claim is shown to be tested and established by a practical condition (cf. 2:5, 6b). The tests attached to these affirmations, τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν (2:4b), αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν (2:6c), have to be understood as a progressive unfolding of the underlying truth in

God's children. These ethical exhortations, proceeding from the context of Jesus as the means of fellowship (1:6-2:2), culminate in the need (ὀφείλει, ought to) to imitate (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος, just as he) Christ (Kenney 2000a:22; cf. also Von Wahlde 1990:217).

²⁷ Verses 2:3-8 discuss the theme, verse 9 prepares for the climax in verse 10, while in verse 11 the climax is emphasized with an antithesis.

²⁸ The passage contains three parallelisms: (1) recognition of our knowledge of God the Father (ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, 2:3) and of our being in Him (ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, 2:5); (2) the formula for introducing an affirmation (ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνοκα αὐτόν, v 4; ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, 2:6); (3) an antithetical parallelism (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, v 3; τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, 2:4).

²⁹ The verb περιπατεῖν occurs five times in 1 John: 1:6, 7; 2:6bis, 11. In 1:6, 7 it connects fellowship with walking in the light/darkness. In 2:11 it connects hatred with darkness and in 2:6 it connects fellowship (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) with imitating Jesus. Thus the use of περιπατεῖν in 2:6 associates the imitating of Jesus (περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν) with 'walking in the light' (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν, 1:7). The infinitive (περιπατεῖν) suggests a present, repeated action.

³⁰ Πονηρόν at the end of unit 12-14 prepares for the introduction of κόσμος in the first verse of sub-section 15-17. At the end of unit 15-17, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα prepares for ἐσχάτη ὥρα in unit 18-28. Also, as often in 1 John, a section of parenesis follows a series of dogmatic statements. The Elder's practical concern for his church members is never far from his theological teaching, given on their behalf. Indeed, doctrine and ethics belong closely together throughout these verses, since the author's explanation of true spirituality has a constantly practical thrust.

³¹ This sub-section is divided into two parallel clusters, which both aim semantically at the same goal. 'The purpose of this parallel recapitulation scheme is to accentuate' (Du Rand 1981:8).

³² 'If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him ...' (ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ. Elsewhere in the epistle (1:6-10; 2:3, 5, 19, 22; 3:17; 4:12, 15, 20) the conditional clause, as in this verse, also indicates an exterior criterion from which it is possible to conclude to an existing interior state. The behavior of one who loves the world is a sign that the love of the Father is not within him.

Verses 2:5; 4:12; 3:17 are parallel to 2:15 in the sense that they treat the indwelling presence of the love of God as correlative to a condition. Verses 2:5 and 4:12 describe ideal Christian conduct, while the remaining two refer to serious failures.

2:5	ὁς δ' ἂν τηρῆ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον,	ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται
4:12	ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους,	ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν
3:17	ὁς δ' ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῆ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα	πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ
2:15	ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον,	οὐκ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ

From these parallel texts it is clear that loving the world is contrary to keeping God's word, to sharing, to loving one another. Love for the world then implies: the refusal to accept God's revelation, selfishness and hatred towards the brethren.

33 God's will can be summed up in the twofold command: 'believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another (3:23). Faith and love are the realization of God's design in us and through these gifts we are filled with his love (2:15) and brought to share in his own life.

34 The high frequency of personal pronouns and verbs in the second person plural heighten the personalization of the passage. Verbs: ἠκούσατε (2:18, 24bis), οἶδατε (2:20, 21bis), μενεῖτε (2:24), ἐλάβετε (2:27), ἔχετε (2:27), μένετε (2:27), μένετε (2:28). Pronouns: ὑμεῖς (2:20, 24bis, 27), ὑμῖν (2:21, 26), ἐν ὑμῖν (2:24bis, 27), ὑμᾶς (2:27).

35 The verb μένετε ... (also ἐν αὐτῷ) occurs twenty-four times in 1 John: 2:6, 14, 17, 19, 24ter, 27bis, 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24bis; 4:12, 13, 15, 16ter. In all these texts it has a theological meaning. Once it is explained with εἰς (2:17), and once with μετὰ (2:19). In all the other instances it occurs with ἐν (2:6, 10, 14, 24ter, 27bis, 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24bis; 4:12, 13; 15:16ter). Expressions with εἶναι ἐν (see next paragraph) predominate in 1:5-2:2 and 2:3-11, while μένετε ἐν predominates in 2:12-28 and foreshadows, according to Malatesta (1978:231), the importance μένειν will have in the rest of the epistle. This tendency definitely points to the Elder's desire to insist on perseverance.

εἶναι is the most frequent word in 1 John (99x). Fifty seven times it is used in an absolute sense (1:5ter, 8, 9; 2:2, 4, 7, 14, 18bis, 2ter, 25, 27bis, 29; 3:1, 2quater, 3, 4, 7bis, 10, 11, 12, 15, 20, 23; 4:3, 8, 10, 15, 16, 17, 20; 5:1, 3bis, 4, 5bis, 6ter, 7, 9bis, 11, 14, 16, 17bis). Eighteen times it is explained with ἐν. It is to be understood with ἐν in 2:15, 16; 4:4bis. It occurs 19x with ἐκ (2:16bis, 19ter, 21; 3:8, 10, 12, 14; 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6bis, 7; 5:19), and once with ἀπό (1:1), πρὸς (1:4), εἰς (5:8), πεπληρωμένη (1:4), and τετελειωμένη (4:12).

36 μένειν μετὰ (2:19), ἐν ὑμῖν μένειν (2:24, 27), ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μενεῖτε (2:24), μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ (2:27, 28).

37 The use of μένειν in 2:17, 19 does not relate to the other texts (2:24, 27) where it is used with the phrase ἐν ὑμῖν.

- 38 There are diverse interpretations of the meaning of the phrase τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα. For most scholars it refers to the ‘Spirit’ (Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel 1972:65; Bruce 1975:71ff; Coetzee (1981:54); Krimmer 1989:64; Von Wahlde 1990:127; Schnackenburg 1992:67; Johnson 1993:57; Edwards 1996:54; Strecker 1996:76f; Painter 2002:198). See Malatesta (1978:204) for an opposite meaning. According to him ‘we understand τὸ χρίσμα to mean the word of God interiorized and assimilated by the believers under the action of the Holy Spirit.’ Vorster (1975:94) interprets ‘it as an event word and that it is possibly an illusion to baptism in which the Holy Spirit plays a significant role.’
- 39 Note that no one can have *the Father* without *the Son*. This unity between the Father and the Son is seen in: ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἓν ἔσμεν (John 10:30); ‘... οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι’ ἐμοῦ. ⁷ εἰ ἐγνώκατέ με, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου γνώσεσθε. καὶ ἀπ’ ἄρτι γινώσκετε αὐτὸν καὶ ἑώρακατε αὐτόν’ (14:6f); ‘... ὁ ἑώρακὼς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα ...’ (14:9).
- 40 Ἔχειν is used in 2:23 (also 2 John 9; cf. 1 John 5:12) to distinguish a distinct relation to God. It makes the having of God as Father dependent on the confession of Christ as the Son, the Son of God and the Messiah in the flesh. Thus, having the Father includes having the Son. Only Christian believers can understand and accept that their fellowship with God is only constituted by way of fellowship with Christ. What it comprises to have the Son may be seen from parallels such as κοινωνία and παράκλητον (Hanse 1978:823f).
- 41 Parallel expressions that connote various aspects of the revelation in Christ are: the word of God (2:14), the will of God (2:17), the anointing (2:20, 27bis), what was heard from the beginning (2:24bis), and the promise (2:25).
- 42 According to 2:24 (also John 15:7; 8:31) is the abiding of Christ in his own inseparably linked with the abiding of his word in his followers. Therefore, ‘he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked’ (2:6). According to Munzer (1978:226) demands and forms the indwelling Christ, or life through the word of Christ, a life conforming to his Spirit and nature, and wills and brings about sanctification.
- 43 A Christological accent is present throughout 2:18-28: 2:20: ἀπο; τοῦ ἁγίου; 2:22: Ἰησοῦς ... ὁ Χριστός, τὸν υἱόν; 2:23: τὸν υἱὸν (bis); 2:24: ἐν τῷ υἱῷ; 2:25: αὐτὸς; 2:27: ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, αὐτοῦ, ἐν αὐτῷ; 2:28: αὐτοῦ ... αὐτοῦ ... αὐτοῦ.
- 44 It occurs six times in 2:20-28; in 3:24 twice explicitly and once by implication; in 4:(12), 13-16 six times explicitly and twice by implication. In 3:24, where the gift of the Spirit is mentioned in close parallel to 4:13-6, the μένειν-motif also figures prominently.

- ⁴⁵ Throughout this unit a number of sources of revelation have been pronounced: the anointing possessed by the community it *has from* the Holy One (2:20) and has *received from* Him (2:27). What they have *heard* from the beginning, should abide in them (2:25). The anointing *teaches* them (2:27).
- ⁴⁶ In 1 John ‘abiding’ is predominantly theocentric. In a number of texts the frequent and characteristic ἐν αὐτῷ (in him) allows for some ambiguity as to whether God or Jesus is intended (2:6, 28; 3:6, 24; 4:13), and in 2:24 abiding is ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ (in the Son and in the Father).
- ⁴⁷ All the explicit references to the Spirit in 1 John is connected to the community (2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:2, 13) rather than to the individual. But implicitly, by implication is the Spirit definitely involved in the individual lives of believers (cf. 2:23; 3:17). In most cases (see previous footnote) the plural is used where the Elder uses μένειν and the singular where he uses ἔχειν (2:23; 5:12).
- ⁴⁸ The verb ‘to abide’ (μένειν) must not be confused with ‘becoming’ a child of God. Through faith (5:1, 13) and rebirth (5:1) one has become a child of God. To abide in Christ succeeds rebirth and relates to God’s guidance and the experience of his presence and communion in the believer’s life.