

Persevering in Christ and Tests of Eternal Life

A. B. Caneday

A. B. Caneday is Professor of New Testament Studies and Biblical Theology at Northwestern College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In addition to numerous journal articles, he is the co-author (with Thomas R. Schreiner) of *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (InterVarsity, 2001). Dr. Caneday is a frequent contributor to *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

Introduction

Whether in English or in Greek, 1 John is an easy read. Its length is sufficiently brief so that one can read it through within one short sitting. Its vocabulary is repetitious. Its syntax is not cumbersome. Its structure is cyclical. Its message is straightforward. Yet, Christians have vastly divergent understandings of 1 John.

Historically, on the basis of 1 John 5:13, Christians have read John's brief homily or pastoral discourse as an encouragement for believers to lay hold of assurance of eternal life and to live in light of this knowledge. Interpretation and use of 1 John among believers, however, took a pronounced shift during the nineteenth century, especially, with the rise of teachers and preachers who advocated various strains of "Christian Perfectionism." Teachings such as those known by the designations "the Victorious Life" or "the Higher Life" popularized the idea that to "have fellowship with God," to "walk in the light," or to "abide in Christ" is the privilege of few Christians, only the few who find the secret or the key.¹ All teachers of "Christian Perfectionism" separate believing from obeying, and by doing this they conceive of at least two classes of Christians.² According to these teachers, most believers commit the error of *trying* to live the Christian life but find themselves "walking in darkness," while some believers *cease trying* and find themselves abiding in Christ.³ Hence, the popular adage: "Let go and let God!"

Popular preaching and teaching on 1 John perpetuates ideas and beliefs derived from "Victorious Life" teachings even though scholarly commentaries lend virtually no support. The influence is consequential, for misreading and misusing 1 John misdirects believers concerning the Christian life and assurance of eternal life. Because various strains of Christian Perfectionism persist in the church, it is proper that we give a fresh consideration of the Christian life as presented in 1 John. The Christian life is not one of repose or of passivity. Believing is not contrary to obeying. "Abiding in Christ" is not the privilege of a few Christians. It is the sustenance of eternal life for all believers. Understanding John's portrayal of being in Christ and abiding in him is elementary and essential for all believers that we might persevere in him and have fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

The Impact of "Christian Perfectionism" on Popular Interpretations of 1 John

Biblical scholars generally agree that 1 John opposes an elitist incipient Gnosticism.⁴ It is ironic, therefore, that Christian Perfectionism movements within the church routinely appeal to 1 John for theological support for classifying believers in various ways, such as "abiding" and "not abiding," which invariably promotes elitism.⁵ This is true of every form of Christian Perfectionism that teachers and preachers have adopted, whatever

the designation—“Higher Life,” “Deeper Life,” “Victorious Life,” “Abundant Life,” “The Spirit-Filled Life,” “Second Blessing,” etc. Accordingly, some believers are spiritual but others are not. Those who are spiritual are “in fellowship” with God. Any Christian who commits sin lapses into “broken fellowship” with God until one confesses “every known sin.” Spiritual believers “walk in the light.” All other believers “walk in the darkness.” Spiritual believers “abide in Christ;” others do not.⁶

The residual impact of Christian Perfectionism upon how Christians read Scripture may be nowhere more evident than in popular interpretations of John’s talk of “having fellowship with God,” of “walking in the light,” of “knowing Christ,” of “being in Christ,” and of “abiding in Christ.” Inattentive to the apostle’s argument, Christians regularly and impulsively recite these expressions as though they speak of the “Higher Life” to which they aspire but few attain. Christian Perfectionism absolutizes these expressions with the effect that any believer who is “walking in the light,” for example, commits no sin. To “abide in Christ” excludes sin.⁷ To make matters worse, too many Christians uncritically embrace the notion that the so-called “abiding life” is one of passive repose and effortlessness.⁸

Contrary to these trends, Robert Law influenced scholars, since his time, with his observations concerning the structure of 1 John.⁹ He identifies three cycles (1:5-2:28; 2:29-4:6; 4:7-5:21) that follow the prologue (1:1-4).¹⁰ According to Law, each of these three cycles entails three integrated tests: righteousness (obedience), love (charity), and belief (doctrine).¹¹ In the final cycle (4:7-5:21) righteousness

synthetically takes a subordinate place to love and belief.¹² Law observes,

To exhibit those characteristics of the Christian life, each of which is an indispensable criterion, and all of which conjointly form the incontestable evidence of its genuineness, is the aim that determines the whole plan of the Epistle, and dictates almost every sentence: “These things I write unto you, that ye may know that ye have Eternal Life” (5:13).¹³

As Law makes clear, the principal focus of the *tests* in 1 John is for us as readers or as hearers to reflect upon ourselves that we might know that we have eternal life. John, thus, does not offer these tests so much as standards by which the Christians are to assess others in order to exclude anyone found wanting—though the apostle tips his hand that the tests may bear such a function (see 2:18-20).¹⁴ His objective is that Christians might pass the tests of life “that we might know that we have come to know him” (2:3) or that we may have assured knowledge that we possess eternal life (5:13).

Regrettably, it is easy to fail to apprehend that Robert Law’s emphasis falls upon the affirmative predilection of 1 John’s tests to *assure* us that we have eternal life rather than to *incite doubt* of its possession. Consequently, some emphasize the inverse of John’s tests of life as proofs to expose “false assurance.”¹⁵ This causes others to blame the inversion of John’s tests of life to Robert Law, as though he has misled scholars since his time. This is a failure to read Law’s *The Tests of Life* correctly. Zane Hodges commits this error as he avers,

It would be hard to devise an approach to John’s first epistle more hopelessly misguided or more completely self-defeating. If the premise

on which this approach is based were true, it would be quite impossible for either the original audience of 1 John or any of its subsequent readers to possess the assurance of salvation.¹⁶

Hodges explains, “Since the writer repeatedly commands the ‘abiding’ life marked by obedience to Christ’s commands, one cannot really be certain that he is saved until death, if ‘abiding’ is a test of salvation.”¹⁷ Hodges further states, “On the view we are discussing, if I stop ‘abiding’ at some point in the future, I was never a Christian at all.” He declares, “This view is absurd in the light of the NT.”¹⁸

Like Hodges, Robert Wilkin misunderstands and misrepresents Robert Law’s concept of “tests of life” as wrecking Christian assurance of eternal life.¹⁹ Wilkin and Hodges insist that the purpose statement of 1 John 5:13 is confined to the immediate context, namely, 5:6-12.²⁰ With Hodges, Wilkin proposes that 1 John has a different stated purpose. It is located in 1:3-4. Instead of presenting “tests of eternal life,” the apostle poses “tests-of-fellowship.”²¹ Who would quarrel with Hodges and Wilkin that the apostle locates his objective in 1:3-4? Read properly, Robert Law views the introductory statement of purpose (1:3-4) as climaxing in the summary expression of purpose in 5:13.²² To “have eternal life” is to “have fellowship with God”—“What we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you in order that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we write these things in order that our joy may be made complete.”

Surely, Hodges and Wilkin are correct that John expresses his purpose for writing in 1:3-4. Indeed, the apostle’s “purpose

is to help readers determine whether they are in fellowship with God.”²³ They mistakenly, however, disconnect “have fellowship” (1:3, 6) from “have eternal life” (5:13) and identify “have fellowship” as an added bonus to “have eternal life,” an option that only some believers attain. This is a form of “Christian Perfectionism.” Instead of accepting John’s contextual defining of “have fellowship” (*koinōnia exein*), Hodges and Wilkin embrace the notion popularized by teachers of Christian Perfectionism that the word refers to the experiential sense of fluctuating intimacy or distance from God, a sensibility that arises from the innumerable variations and exigencies of life.²⁴ Likewise, they embrace the popular corollary notions that John’s uses of “knowing Christ” (*ginōskō*), of “being in Christ” (*eimi en*), and of “persevering in Christ” (*menō en*) refer to the same experiential sense of varying closeness to and intimacy with God, as an added bonus to having eternal life.²⁵ For them, then, the apostle’s tests call for us to assess the transient and ever vacillating sense of intimacy with God, not eternal life itself.

According to the apostle, to “have fellowship with the Father and with the Son” is to *share something in common* with them. John designs his “tests of fellowship” to usher us into an assurance of something more substantial than the transient sense of intimacy with the Father and with the Son. John’s objective is to shepherd us to an assurance that endures and does not waver with the exigencies of life. Contextually, it seems apparent that to “have fellowship with God” entails a share in “life” and “light,” both qualities of God disclosed in the Word of Life, God’s Son. Initially, John speaks of the Word of Life that appeared to “us” (the apostles), and is proclaimed to his readers in order that

they may “have fellowship with us.” This fellowship seems to entail having a share in the Word of Life, for John explains that what he desires to share is nothing other than what he shares with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ, namely, eternal life.²⁶ The context compels us initially to regard *eternal life* as the thing John desires to share in common with others but also the thing he shares in common with the Father and with the Son. This, however, does not exhaust the fullness of what John means with his expression, “to have fellowship.”

Robert Law correctly says,

Light is the medium in which fellowship between God and man is consciously realised; the first element which He and we may possess in common. . . . For sinners, fellowship with God cannot initially, consist in sharing His moral perfection. The Light in which we, being yet sinful, can walk so as to have fellowship with God, is the Light of Truth, the Light which His self-revelation sheds upon all objects in the moral universe, and, first of all, upon ourselves and our sin. . . . And especially is it the element in which we, though yet sinful, can have fellowship with God; because, when by confessing our sins we walk in the Light, “the Blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”²⁷

That Law is correct becomes evident as one ponders the apostle’s reasoning in 1:5-7. John reasons that the Word of Life, God’s Son, brought a message that *we* apostles proclaim to *you*. This message is that God is pure light, shining the brilliance of his character—truthful, righteous, and loving—through the gospel so as to summon us to “walk in the light” as the “necessary and sufficient condition of fellowship with God.”²⁸

Thus, if we make the claim that we have fellowship with God, which is to say

that we dwell in the light with God, but we actually seek the cover of darkness for our conduct, we speak falsely and we behave contrary to the truth exposed by shafts of light cast by God’s self-disclosure in his Son. On the other hand, we who have fellowship with God have no need to announce with fanfare that we have a share in the light that shines forth from God through his Son (cf. John 3:19-21). Instead, if we behave as people who belong to the light, as God is in the light, we have a share in this light with God, and the sacrificial atoning death of God’s Son, Jesus, purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:5-7).²⁹ Thus, to “have fellowship with God” is to “walk in the light” God shines forth in the gospel, for John is fond of restating his thoughts in a variety of ways.

John’s use of the imagery, “walk in the light,” offers no support for the popular explanation that it depicts *living without committing any sin*, whether for a brief or extended time, a notion that still pervades evangelical churches. For John, to “walk in the light” draws upon imagery that portrays the life of every believer as an unpretentious and steady walk upon a course in which the believer becomes aware of sinful deeds exposed by the light and along the way finds cleansing for every sin through the blood of Jesus (1:7). In other words, to “walk in the light” entails imagery that aptly represents the conduct that distinguishes believers from non-believers (cf. John 3:19-21). Indeed, believers commit sins, but God’s light shining through the gospel exposes our sins and through Christ’s death, we receive cleansing from every sin. How do we receive this cleansing? In 1 John 1:7 the apostle does not tell us *how* we who “walk in the light” receive cleansing from sin.

Instead, he emphasizes two things: (1) *that* we receive cleansing as we “walk in the light,” and (2) *the basis on which* we receive cleansing. In 1:9, John does not need to reiterate *the basis* of God’s forgiveness and cleansing, since he already indicates this in 1:7. In 1:9 he simply explains *how* we receive cleansing—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”³⁰ Confessing sin, thus, is integral to “walking in the light.” For John, this is the Christian life. Believers confess their sins to God and receive forgiveness and cleansing. To have fellowship with God is not momentary; it is not transitory. It is enduring and vigorous but it is also reciprocal in that fellowship entails vital connection with God.³¹

Yet, for many, problems persist. If all believers “have fellowship with God,” then why does John pose the supposition, “If we claim, ‘We have fellowship with him,’ and we walk in darkness, we lie and we do not practice the truth” (1:6)? If every believer “walks in the light,” what should we make of the apostle’s supposition, “If we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another” (1:7)? If it is impossible to be a believer and at the same time not “know Christ,” then why does John say, “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commands” (2:3)? Does this “test” imply that it is possible to be a believer and not “know Christ,” even more, not “keep his commands?” Furthermore, if all Christians “abide in Christ,” then why does the apostle John command, “And now, children, abide in him in order that if he is revealed, we may acquire confidence and not be put to shame by him in his coming” (e.g., 2:28)? That John speaks this way, many

reason, necessarily indicates that the apostle means that one can be a believer and yet fail to have fellowship with God, fail to walk in the light but instead walk in darkness, fail to know God, and fail to abide in Christ. Many puzzle over why Scripture appeals to us as believers *to be* or *to do* if God’s grace through the gospel has already made us *who we are* and *what we do*.³² These and related questions comprise the remainder of this essay.

Being and Abiding in Christ: Reciprocal Vital Union

Throughout 1 John the apostle’s favorite designation for his readers is “my children,” an expression of endearment using diminutive forms of *tekna* (*teknia mou* or *teknia* and *paidia*).³³ These terms of fatherly affection flow from John’s pastoral concern that his readers “may have fellowship with us” who “have fellowship with the Father and with his Son” (1:3). Elsewhere, when John addresses his readers as God’s seed or descendants through Christ, he uses *tekna theou* (“children of God”), because God, not he, is their one true Father.³⁴ John reserves *huios theou* (“Son of God”) as a title for Jesus Christ.³⁵ At the heart of 1 John the apostle sketches a sharp antithesis of parentage between the “children of God” (*ta tekna tou theou*) and the “children of the devil” (*ta tekna tou diabolou*; 3:10). Thus, rather than accent the status of “sonship” (*huiiothesia*), John uses “children of God” (*tekna theou*) to emphasize parentage.³⁶ God’s children bear family resemblance. We are like our Father.

John’s use of the child imagery (*tekna theou*) implies permanent impartation of the Father’s paternal characteristics to his seed, his offspring (3:9). Yet, lest anyone exaggerate this imagery as though God’s

children exist independently and develop apart from the life of God, as a human child develops independently of essential connection with one's parents, the apostle draws heavily upon another image. Thus, John employs language that undoubtedly owes much to the viticulture imagery Jesus employs in John 15. One can hardly doubt that

the whole conception of the Epistle has had its origin in the Gospel similitude of the Vine and the branches (John 15:1-10). According to the analogy there presented, the vitalising union by which the influx of Divine Life is maintained in those who are "begotten" of God, consists in two activities, not identical, not separable, but reciprocal—God's abiding in us, and our abiding in Him.³⁷

Consequently, the imagery of God begetting us as children who bear his resemblance finds its complement in the plant life imagery. The imagery of "abiding" (*menō*, "persevering"), used extensively in Jesus' viticulture analogy (John 15), makes clear that the eternal life imparted to us from God who begets us as his children depends entirely upon a continual influx of the vitality of eternal life from our parental source for its endurance, sustenance, and growth.³⁸

John structures his whole epistle (or better "homily") around this imagery-rich concept of participation in eternal life with the Father, life that is ours through Jesus Christ. His pastoral concern seems to center upon two things bound together inextricably. On the one hand, he sketches in bold relief the characteristics that distinguish the children of God from the children of the devil. On the other hand, he enunciates these distinguishing characteristics with clarity in order that he might trouble the consciences of all who

yield to the seductions of false teachers, and simultaneously console the hearts of all believers (e.g., 2:18-29). John carefully weaves these two aspects together but with a pronounced emphasis upon writing with one overarching purpose: "that you who believe in the name of the Son of God might know that you have eternal life" (5:13).

Tests of Fellowship with God and with His Son

Throughout 1:5-2:10, as he lays before us tests of fellowship with God, John juxtaposes *claims* of possessing life alongside *organic or inborn manifestation* of the possession of life. In 1:6-2:1, he does this through three antithetical hypothetical propositions. He draws upon what seem to be boasts or slogans that some among his readers are touting. Yet, John casts these as conditionals with the first person plural, "we," to include himself, for the truths that he expresses hypothetically know no exceptions. By doing so, the apostle John makes the urgency and indispensability of his statement clear. John has fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. His conditional propositions are still true. The inviolability of the connection holds for the apostle, too. It is impossible for anyone, the apostle included, to have a share in eternal life with God and at the same time walk in darkness.

Over against the three claims conditionally framed to include himself (1:6, 8, 10), John juxtaposes three corresponding but counter propositions also expressed as conditions (1:7, 9, 2:1). There is a subtle or understated but powerful element in John's opening tests of fellowship. Asserting Christian claims evidently characterizes the people who oppose John's gospel.

John makes his case neither by calling them hypocrites nor by saying, “They claim one thing but do another.” Rather, he exploits their claims by turning them into tests. He does not point his finger and say, “You claim one thing but do another.” He avoids using the second person personal pronoun. Instead, he uses the first person plural—“if we”—as he frames tests that confront readers individually. Not even the apostle escapes the scrutiny of his tests. The invariableness of the connections expressed by the conditional propositions holds for everyone who claims to have a share in light and life with God made manifest through the Word of Life, his Son. Claims of this fellowship contradicted by lived behavior are falsehoods that expose hypocrisy. The life of God, organic and inborn, irrepressibly reveals itself with behavior that is commensurate with the divine life (cf. 3:6-10). Those who boast of fellowship with God engage in empty talk. Those who walk in the light manifest true fellowship with God that is discernible (see table below).

After a brief pastoral interruption (2:1-2) of his antithetical juxtaposition of *claims* of possessing life over against invariable *organic or inborn manifestations* of the possession of life to address God’s remedy for sin, in 2:2-10, John returns to this antipodal pattern, but with grammatical variation. Substantival participles, “the one who claims” (*ho legōn*; 2:4, 6, 9), replace the conditional conjunction with the subjunctive verb, “if we claim” (*ean eipōmen*; 1:7, 8, 10). John’s substitution of the substantival participle for *ean* with the subjunctive verb implicitly retains a conditional sense.⁴⁰ To see this more clearly, consider 2:4 translated as an explicit conditional: “If anyone claims, ‘I know him,’ and is not keeping his commandments, is a liar and is not in the truth.” As implicit conditional sentences, verses 4, 6, and 9 function as tests. Behavior invariably exposes the veracity of one’s claims. Sinful behavior invariably betrays the claims, “I know him,” “I abide in him,” and “I am in the light” (see table next page).

	Empty Talk		Discernible Walk
1:6	<i>If we claim</i> , “We have fellowship with him,” but walk in darkness we lie and do not do the truth.	1:7	<i>If we walk</i> in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.
1:8	<i>If we claim</i> , “We do not have sin,” we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.	1:9	<i>If we confess</i> our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us these sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
1:10	<i>If we claim</i> , “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar and his word is not in us. ³⁹	2:1	My little children, I write to you in order that you not sin, and if <i>someone sins</i> , we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

	Claims Made	Claims Falsified by Tests
2:4	I know him.	Keep his commandments.
2:6	I abide in him.	Walk as That One walked.
2:9	I am in the light.	Love one's spiritual sibling.

As with verses 4, 6, and 9, so also verses 5 and 10 employ implicit conditions. Verse 5 expresses an implicit condition by using a relative pronoun clause followed by an indicative verb: "Whoever keeps his word . . . is perfected."⁴¹ In verse 10, John expresses the implicit conditional by way of the substantival participle followed by an indicative verb, "The one who loves . . . perseveres."⁴²

Throughout 1:5-2:10, John's language of projection, grammaticalized as conditions, beckons readers to engage in the vigilant exercise of self-assessment. Does my behavior comport with my claims? Does my conduct reveal the organic and inborn traits of light and life shared in common with God? John's tests are not complex. They are crisp, sharp, and cogent. Yet, they do not depict perfection. According to John, walking in the light (1:7; 2:10), which is perseverance in the way of the gospel, is not walking without any stumbles at all. Perseverance in the light is walking that entails confessing both possession of sin and acts of sin in order to receive cleansing from sin (1:7, 9). Furthermore, John's tests do not call for dubious and prolonged self-scrutiny that feeds and indulges doubt. Instead, his tests call for the instinctual sense that one's share in the life that comes from God is readily discernible because the child bears the indelible characteristics of his parentage (3:6-10). The apostle's purpose is not to confound us but to offer us warranted bases for assurance, as he says, "And by this we know that we have come

to know God, if we keep his commands" (2:3).⁴³ John's second use of the phrase, "by this we know," in 2:5 confirms that we are correct to paraphrase, "And by this we have assurance that we have come to share in union with God and have a share in his life and light as revealed through Jesus Christ."⁴⁴ To know that we have come to know God (2:3) is simply a variation on saying that we know that we are in God (2:5).⁴⁵ The kind of knowledge to which John beckons us is indubitable assurance that we have come into union with God through Jesus Christ.

Once John's argument moves to the second set of claims, of "knowing God" (2:3) and of "abiding in God" (2:6) as parallel with the claim of "being in the light" (2:10), it becomes transparent that the two series of claims or slogans that he isolates in the form of tests, are all variations on one theme. The theme is fellowship with God—having a share in the light and life of God. John's argument progresses by spiraling upward as it moves back over his starting point. The imagery of light runs its course, beginning in 1:5 and climaxing in 2:10. John introduces the light imagery in 1:5, and it emerges five times thereafter, in 1:7, 2:8, 9, and 10. God is light (1:5). Everyone who has fellowship with God walks in the light, God's domain (1:7). The one who claims, "I am in the light," while hating one's spiritual siblings is in darkness, never having left it (2:9). One who dwells in the light need not lay claim to it; one who is in the light with God is manifest by behavior, particularly, by lov-

ing one's spiritual siblings (2:10).

Knowing God and Abiding in God: The Function of Admonition

In John's second set of three juxtaposed propositions (2:3-10), he introduces two expressions, "knowing God" and "abiding in God," for the first time, and enmeshes these with the three tests that punctuate the landscape of 1 John: righteousness (obedience), love (charity), and belief (doctrine). "Knowing God" and "abiding in God" become prominent throughout the remainder of John's discourse, but especially throughout chapters 2 and 3. "Abiding in God" is readily discernible, because whoever "perseveres in God" walks the course marked out by "That One," Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ Hereafter in 1 John, "That One," is the model and measure of God's children. The apostle makes it clear, then, that believers are truly "Christians" in that they are diminutives of "Christ."⁴⁷ As That One walked, so we walk (2:6). As That One is pure, so we purify ourselves (3:3). As That One is righteous, so we find that we are righteous (3:7). As That One is, so we are in the world (4:17).

Yet, if all believers "know God," "abide in God," and "are in the light," why does the apostle exhort us? Why exhort, "If what you heard from the beginning [the Word] remains in you, then you also will remain in the Son and in the Father" (2:24)? Why instruct, "And you, this anointing that you have from him remains in you, and you have no need that someone teach you, but as this anointing from him teaches you concerning all things and is authentic and is not false, persevere in him even as the anointing teaches you" (2:27)? Why admonish, "And now, children, persevere in him in order that if he is revealed we may acquire boldness and not be put to

shame by him in his coming" (2:28)?

Contextually, we find that one reason John issues these admonitions is that some have abandoned an allegiance to which they had formerly committed themselves. John speaks of them as "antichrists," but with this expression, he refers to many ordinary people who once counted themselves among God's people but have since forsaken the assembly of believers to run after their new teachers and new teachings.⁴⁸ In 2:18-19, the apostle speaks of their defection this way:

Children, it is the last hour and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. From this, we rightly infer that it is the last hour. They defected from us, but they were not from us. For, if they were from us, they would have persevered with us, but they defected in order that it might be manifest that they all are not from us.

Clearly, John's statement plays on the phrase, "from us" (*ex hēmōn*), used four times, alongside the clarifying phrase, "with us" (*meth' hēmōn*), that confirms his meaning. The apostle has already used an expression that should prepare his readers to understand what he is saying in these verses. In 2:9 he says, "The one who claims to be in the light and hates his spiritual sibling is in the darkness *until now*." The expression, "is in the darkness *until now*," is noteworthy because it indicates that John regards such an individual as an imposter *from the start*, as a person whose behavior betrays one's claim as false *from the beginning*. Such a person never was in the light, despite claims to the contrary. Therefore, when John speaks of many people, whom he does not hesitate to identify as *antichrists* who abandon the assembly of believers to go after teachings contrary to the message he and the apostles have

proclaimed (cf. 1:1-5), he also does not hesitate to render his judgment: *They never did belong with us.*⁴⁹ For John, the phrases “not of us” and “not with us” find their meaning in his statement in 1:3, “What we looked upon and heard we proclaim also to you in order that you also may have fellowship *with us*, and our fellowship is *with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*” The strictures of elitist group loyalty do not motivate John. Rather, his words, “not of us” and “not with us,” refer to exclusion from communion with God and with one another, communion that exists in belief and love. In other words, the defectors never had fellowship with us or with the Father and the Son. If they are intruders, even worse, they are liars (2:22).

There is another facet, however, concerning what John says in 2:18-19. Not only does he account for the antichrists’ defection by identifying them as people who never were anything other than imposters. He also accounts for the perseverance of all who are authentic by saying, “if they were from us, *they would have remained with us.*” His point is not obtuse. Those who are not imposters persevere, for anyone who has fellowship with the Father and with the Son *continues* in fellowship with them. John reinforces this by contrasting those who lack the divine anointing (*antichristoi*) with us who have God’s anointing (*chrisma*), a likely play on words.⁵⁰ “And you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it and because no falsehood is from the truth” (2:20-21). All Christians receive this anointing, an inborn aptitude, with the effect that we are able to discern the identity of antichrists by considering their doctrine.

In order to understand why John issues his various exhortations (2:24, 27, 28) and how they function, it is insufficient simply to observe that false teachers and their followers intruded into the midst of God’s people. This is especially so because John expresses confidence that believers remain steadfast in the Father and in the Son. How, then, are the apostle’s appeals in 1 John for us “to persevere in Christ” compatible with his belief that believers “do persevere in Christ” and will not perish?

Fellowship with the Father and with the Son is not mechanistic. It is a relationship of vitality and reciprocity.⁵¹

As the abiding of God in us is the persistent and purposeful action by which the Divine nature influences ours, so our abiding in God is the persistent and purposeful submission of ourselves to that action. The only means of doing this which the Epistle expressly emphasises is steadfast retention of and adherence to the truth as it is announced in the Apostolic Gospel (2:24; cf. John 8:31) and as it is witnessed by the Spirit (2:27). Yet, although “keeping God’s commandments,” “abiding in love,” and “confessing” Christ are exhibited primarily as the requisite effects and tests of our abiding in God, these effects become in their turn means.⁵²

Because our relationship is living and organic, not mechanical, God sustains our abiding in him with appeals from the same gospel through which our fellowship with God first began (1:3-5). Thus, as the apostle John first proclaimed the message concerning the Word of Life, so he admonishes us with the same message, for life and light is ours only through this same message.

The apostle makes his appeals to us not because he lacks confidence that God’s children will remain in him but

because God preserves us as his children through such admonitions. Herein is the reciprocity of our vital union with God in Christ Jesus.

John exhorts us, “If what you heard from the beginning [the Word] *remains in you*, then you also will remain in the Son and in the Father” (2:24). Vigilance is essential. Enduring remembrance of the gospel, the Word of Life, is necessary to sustain our vital union with the Son and with the Father. The apostle commands us, “And you, this anointing that you have from him remains in you and you have no need that someone teach you, but as this anointing from him teaches you concerning all things and is authentic and is not false, *persevere in him* even as the anointing teaches you” (2:27). God’s anointing, likely to be understood as the Spirit, perseveres in us and bestows knowledge. The Spirit’s perseverance, however, does not alleviate us of the need for diligent perseverance in Christ. John commands, “Persevere in him even as the anointing teaches you.” Because our eternal blessedness is at stake, John admonishes us, “And now, children, *persevere in him* in order that if he is revealed we might acquire confidence and not be put to shame by him in his coming” (2:28).⁵³

True as it is that without persevering in him, at his coming, Christ will banish us in shame to eternal perdition, we must not attribute more to our perseverance in him than John’s admonition allows. Let no one suppose that our persevering in Christ establishes our union with him. Our union with the Son and with the Father is one of reciprocity, but priority and causality is not ours. These belong to God who is the source of life and light.⁵⁴ John reinforces the priority of our reciprocal union with the Father and with the Son

in his next statement (2:29). Observe how John frames his statement for maximal pastoral consolation. He leads us to draw the inference of causality and at the same time draw assurance from the inference: “If you know that he is righteous, you know that also everyone who does righteousness has been born of him.”⁵⁵

John’s admonitions in 2:24, 27, and 28 do not annul confidence that we are “in God” and that we “abide in him.” On the contrary, each of John’s exhortations encourages assurance. John does subvert and demolish the confidence of those who lay claim to know God and to abide in him but who walk in darkness, do not obey God’s commands, do not follow the way of Christ, do not love others, and follow the antichrists. These are all liars. Had they not been liars, they would have persevered with us (2:19). They have never passed from death to life. Instead, they persist (*menō*) in death (3:14). But for all who remain in Christ, confidence is theirs now and for the Day to come, as John says, “And now, children, persevere in him in order that if he is revealed we might acquire confidence and not be put to shame by him in his coming” (2:28). According to the apostle’s exhortation, perseverance in Christ yields confidence.

When John exhorts us who *are abiding* in Christ Jesus *to continue to abide* in him, his purpose is not to question whether we are abiding in him. Rather, he exhorts us because our union with Christ is not mechanical but living and reciprocal. To give proper expression to the function of the apostle’s exhortation to God’s offspring, we can hardly do better than Berkouwer when he states that

it would appear that anyone who sees a contradiction between the

doctrine of perseverance and the numberless admonitions of the Holy Scriptures, has abstracted perseverance from faith. Faith itself can do nothing else than listen to those admonitions and so travel the road of abiding in Him. For admonition distinguishes the true confidence, which looks for everything from grace, and the other "possibility," which is rejected on the basis of Christ and the Church. So admonition is at the same time both a remembrance and a calling. It points out the way of error to those who travel the way of salvation, and it exhorts them to keep going only in the true way.⁵⁶

Conclusion

First John is a sustained message that distinguishes "two ways." One is the way of eternal life; the other is the way of death. John's purpose in starkly distinguishing these two ways is to encourage believers that we "might know that we have eternal life" (5:13). This assurance, however, does not become ours merely by laying claims to knowing God (2:4) or by professing that we abide in him (2:6) or by asserting that we are in the light (2:9), all claims of having fellowship with God. Nor do we come into possession of this assurance by cerebral, logical syllogisms. We know that we have come to know God only in the course of believing, of loving, and of obeying—the three integrated tests that John weaves throughout the three cycles of his pastoral homily (1:5-2:28; 2:29-4:6; 4:7-5:21). The apostle puts these tests before us throughout the spirals of his three cycles, neither to frustrate us nor to call into question the legitimacy of our bold confidence. Rather, he places these tests before us for his stated purpose, that we "might know that we have eternal life."

Neither John's tests of "being in God" nor his admonitions to "persevere in

Christ" subvert believing, loving, and obeying. Instead, both bolster our believing, our loving, and our obeying. Both his tests and his admonitions remind us afresh of the initial call of the apostolic message that life and light are ours only as we remain in fellowship with God. Knowledge that we have come to know God is ours not by assertion but only by inborn and organic union with God in Christ Jesus. For every believer, this fellowship with God yields invariable and irrevocable consequences both for the present and for the age to come, eternal life.

ENDNOTES

¹Cf. Hannah Whithall Smith's, *The Christian's Secret of A Happy Life* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1952), 15.

²*Ibid*, 27-29. Smith separates *believing* from *doing* when she claims, "To state it in brief, I would say, that man's part is to trust, and God's part is to work. . . . Plainly the believer can do nothing but trust; while the Lord, in whom he trusts, actually does the work entrusted to Him. *Trusting* and *doing* are certainly contrasted things, often indeed contradictory; but are they contradictory in this case? Manifestly not, because it is two different parties that are concerned. . . . When we say, therefore, that in this higher life, man's part is to trust, and God's part is to do the thing entrusted to Him, we do not surely present any very difficult or puzzling problem."

³*Ibid*, 37. Smith says, "I shall now, therefore, consider it as a settled point that the Scriptures do set before the believer in the Lord Jesus a life of abiding rest and of continual victory, which is very far beyond the ordinary run of Christian experience; and that in the Bible we

have presented to us a Saviour able to save us from the power of our sins as really as He saves us from their guilt."

⁴Cf. D. A. Carson, "The Johannine Letters," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 351; Gary M. Burge, "Letters of John," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 590-93.

⁵See B. B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (vol. 7-8; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

⁶For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer asserts, "By various terms the Bible teaches that there are two classes of Christians: those who 'abide in Christ,' and those who 'abide not'; those who are 'walking in the light,' and those who 'walk in darkness'; those who 'walk by the Spirit,' and those who 'walk as men'; those who 'walk in newness of life,' and those who 'walk after the flesh'; those who have the Spirit 'in' and 'upon' them, and those who have the Spirit 'in' them, but not 'upon' them; those who are 'spiritual' and those who are 'carnal'; those who are 'filled with the Spirit,' and those who are not. All this has to do with the quality of daily life of saved people, and is in no way a contrast between the saved and the unsaved" (*He That Is Spiritual* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 40). Chafer insists upon the above distinctions while simultaneously objecting to "such man-made, unbiblical terms as

'second blessing,' 'a second work of grace,' 'the higher life,' and various phrases used in the perverted statements of the doctrines of sanctification and perfection" (41). Cf. Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969). Sample the readings collected by Herbert F. Stevenson, ed., *Keswick's Authentic Voice: Sixty-Five Dynamic Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1875-1957* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959).

⁷Some, who embrace a blatant form of "Christian Perfectionism," think they find support in John's stark statements in 1 John 3:6, 9: "No one who perseveres in him sins; no one who sins has seen him nor known him. . . . No one who is born of God commits sin because God's seed remains in him." They think that John's statements authorize the claim that it is possible for Christians to live without sin (but cf. 1 John 1:8). Others, who believe and teach a more subtle or nuanced form of "Christian Perfectionism," also find support from 1 John 3:6, 9. Zane Hodges, for example, expounds 1 John 3:9 thus:

In other words, the regenerate one is sinless because he is begotten by a sinless Parent. It is completely contrary to the intent of the author to water such statements down. A sinless Parent does not beget a child who only sins a little. To say this, is in fact to deny what the text intends to communicate.

But how are such claims to be harmonized with the direct statement of 1:8 that no believer can claim to be sinless? There seems to be one simple way in which this can be done. The

claims of 3:6 and 9 pertain to the believer when he is viewed only as 'abiding' or as one who is 'born of God.' That is, sin is never the product of our abiding experience. It is never the act of the regenerate self per se. On the contrary, sin is the product of ignorance and blindness toward God. 'Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him' (3:6b). When a believer sins, he is acting out of darkness, not out of knowledge. He is acting as a man of flesh, not as a regenerate person (Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension* [2nd ed.; Dallas: Redención Viva, 1992], 65-66).

Indeed, John's stark statements in 1 John 3:6, 9 challenge our apprehension. Surely, however, psychologically fragmenting the believer as Hodges does, as though the apostle conceives of the believer as not a whole person, is neither helpful nor biblically acceptable. John's phraseology, which treats the believer as a wholly integrated person, does not tolerate Hodges's explanation.

Many commentators regard the expression, "his seed remains in him" (*sperma autou en autō menei*) as speaking of "a divine life principle" within the believer. For example, see B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 107-108. Some view *sperma theou* as referring to the Holy Spirit, such as Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 124-125. Stephen Smally defends the view that *sperma* signifies "the word of God" (1, 2, 3 *John* [Word Biblical Commentary; vol. 51; Waco, TX: Word, 1984], 172-174). Do

commentators, perhaps, too facilely pass over the simplest explanation that *sperma theou* refers to “God’s offspring”? For example, characteristic is I. Howard Marshall who states, “It is possible to take ‘God’s seed’ to mean ‘God’s offspring.’ . . . But this interpretation has found little favor, and most commentators take ‘seed’ to refer metaphorically to a divine principle of life which abides in the believer” (*The Epistles of John*, [New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 186). Consider Donald Burdick’s comments, “Others view the term *sperma* as referring to God’s offspring. The apostle would then be saying that no one born of God sins because God’s children abide in Him. But the use of *sperma* here to designate God’s offspring is quite unexpected. John has referred to Christians as born of God (2:29) and as children of God (3:1-2), but there is nothing in the context to indicate that *sperma* is being used in this sense” (*The Letters of John the Apostle* [Chicago: Moody, 1985], 247). It is puzzling that Burdick contends that nothing in the context suggests that *sperma theou* signifies “God’s offspring,” when the whole context entails John’s discussion of our parentage. Why is the simplest explanation not the best? It seems quite reasonable to understand John’s use of *sperma autou* (his seed) as equivalent to “the one born from God” (*ho gegennēmenos ek tou theou*). If so, he uses *sperma* similar to the way other NT writers do, as referring to “descendants.” Consider the structure of 1 John 3:9. One could arrange

the text in parallel structure.

Everyone who is born from God
does not sin
because his seed remains in
him,
And he is not able to sin,
because he is born from God.

The structure suggests that the two causal clauses are parallel and as such that they both speak of our parentage. On the other hand, one could arrange the text in a chiasmic schema.

Everyone who is *born from God*
does not sin
because *his seed* remains in
him,
and he is not able to sin,
because he is *born from God*.

If the text is so arranged, whether in simple parallelism or in a more complex chiasm, the simplest reading of 1 John 3:9 would be, “No one who is born of God commits sin because God’s offspring remains in God, and he is not able to sin because he is born from God” (note the use of generic “he”). Throughout 3:6-10 John contrasts two lines of descent: divine parentage over against devilish parentage.

⁸For example, consider the popular training manual, *Sharing the Abundant Life* (Campus Crusade for Christ, 1971), 137: “*The abiding life is an effortless life*. How slowly do we arrive at this simple fact, that true New Testament living is effortless. . . . Why do we need to try? Only because we are not abiding. Then the truest test

of Christian living is in the question: *Am I trying or am I abiding?*”

⁹Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of The First Epistle of St. John* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1-24.

¹⁰*Ibid*, 21-24. The three cycles are: (1) The Christian Life, as Fellowship with God, Conditioned and Tested by Walking in the Light (1:5-2:28); (2) The Christian Life, as that of Divine Sonship, Approved by the Same Tests (2:29-4:6); and (3) Closer Correlation of Righteousness, Love and Belief (4:7-5:21).

¹¹Cf. Carson, “The Johannine Letters,” 353.

¹²Law, *The Tests of Life*, 15ff.

¹³*Ibid*, 208.

¹⁴Cf. Carson, “The Johannine Letters,” 353.

¹⁵John MacArthur, Jr. states, “[W]e must deal briefly with the issue of false assurance. Throughout 1 John the apostle attacks the false profession of those who have no right to assurance: ‘The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him’ (2:4). ‘The one who hates his spiritual sibling is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes’ (2:11). ‘Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father’ (2:23). ‘The one who practices sin is of the devil’ (3:8). ‘Everyone who hates his spiritual sibling is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him’ (3:15). ‘The one who does not love does not know God’ (4:8). ‘If someone says, “I love God,”

and hates his spiritual sibling, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his spiritual sibling whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen' (4:20)." (*Faith Works: The Gospel according to the Apostles* [Dallas: Word, 1992], 172). In the segment cited, MacArthur engages Zane Hodges's view concerning assurance of eternal life formulated in *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 50-51.

¹⁶Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 51. Hodges attributes this view to Robert Law (152, n. 1).

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid, 51. Hodges mistakenly assumes that because John's talk of "abiding in Christ" entails Christian faithfulness, it necessarily means that the believer is capable of lapsing from Christ. Because Hodges clings unrelentingly to the belief that no one who is in Christ can perish, for Hodges, it is absurd to conceive of "abiding in Christ" as descriptive of union with him for salvation. Because Hodges equally clings unyieldingly to the notion that the apostle's appeal to us to "persevere in Christ" (cf. 2:28) necessarily means that believers may lapse from "abiding in Christ," "abiding in Christ" entails "intimacy with God" not possession of eternal life. Thus, Hodges rescues his doctrine of "eternal security" but at a massive ransom price. He gives up any doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

¹⁹Robert Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 82f. Whether Wilkin's misunder-

standing of Law's "tests of life" derives from his own misreading of Law or from abuses of Law's work by others is not fully clear.

²⁰Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 82-83; Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 56.

²¹Ibid, 83. Cf. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 55-57.

²²Law, *Tests of Life*, 52-66.

²³Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 83.

²⁴Cf. Zane Hodges, "Fellowship and Confession in 1 John 1:5-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 46-60. Hodges "perfectionism" is apparent, for he states concerning John's use of "have fellowship" (1:3, 6), "It follows therefore that, for John, 'fellowship' must be something more than what his readers have automatically acquired as a result of their new birth" (51-52). For Hodges, to "have fellowship with God" is not the property of all believers but only some.

²⁵Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 83ff; Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 57ff.

²⁶Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (trans. Reginald & Ilse Fuller; New York: Crossroad, 1992), 63ff.

²⁷Law, *Tests of Life*, 59-60.

²⁸Ibid, 64. Law employs "condition" in the sense of that which needs to be present within the person in order for eternal life to be possessed.

²⁹The popular assumption that the phrase "we have fellowship with one another" (*koinōnian exomen met' allelōn*) in 1 John 1:7 refers to "fellowship with fellow believers" misunderstands John's referent. Instead, the "we" of John's expression is *believers and God*. The orientation

of the clause, in 1:7, concerning the sharing of life and light is vertical, not horizontal.

³⁰The English idiom does not adequately express the emphasis of John's Greek idiom in 1:9. John shifts from the plural, in "he forgives us our sins" (*tas hamartias*), to the singular, in "he cleanses us from every unrighteousness" (*apo pasēs adikias*).

³¹Law, *Tests of Life*, 199-200.

³²Few would pose the matter as starkly as this: "Merely to exhort an unspiritual Christian is a loss of time and energy. When the Christian becomes spiritual, he will need no exhortation; but he himself becomes an exhorter both by precept and example" (Chafer, *He That is Spiritual*, 7).

³³John uses the diminutive form, *tekna*, seven times (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) and the diminutive form, *paidia*, twice (2:14, 18).

³⁴See 1 John 3:1, 2, 10; and 5:2.

³⁵John uses *huios theou* 22 times (1 John 1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20).

³⁶*Tekna theou* accentuates "primarily, the direct communication of the Father's own Divine nature; and secondly, the fact that the nature thus communicated has not as yet reached its full stature, but contains the promise of a future and glorious development" (Law, *The Tests of Life*, 194-95).

³⁷Law, *Tests of Life*, 197-98. Law continues, "These are two distinct actions, Divine and human, yet so bound up together in the unity of life that either or both can always be predicated regarding the same persons and certified by the same

signs—the three great tests of Righteousness, Love, and Belief which meet us everywhere in the Epistle” (198).

³⁸Cf. Ibid, 198.

³⁹One can make a case that John uses either indirect or direct discourse in 1:6, 8, 10. In order to emphasize the claims made, I have translated the verses as entailing direct discourse.

⁴⁰Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 688. The examples Wallace provides follow the formula *ho* + participle + future indicative verb. The apostle John’s pattern in 1 John 2:4ff, however, is *ho* + participle + present indicative verb.

⁴¹John’s expression is *hos d’an tērē*. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 688.

⁴²The grammar is *hos* + participle + present indicative verb.

⁴³The pronoun *auton*, in the clause, “by this we know that we have come to know him,” refers to God. Cf. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 78.

⁴⁴John uses the expression, “by this we know” (*en toutō ginōskomen*) four times (3:24; 4:13; 5:2) and variations seven times (*hothen ginōskomen*, 2:18; *en toutō phanera*, 3:9; *en toutō ginōskomen*, 3:15; *en toutō gnōsometha*, 3:19; *en toutō ginōskete*, 4:2; *ek toutou ginōskomen*, 4:6; *en toutō ephanerōthē*, 4:9). In each situation, John speaks of acquisition of indubitable or confident knowledge and understanding.

⁴⁵In 2:3, John uses the expression, “we have come to know him” (*egnōkamen auton*). He uses the per-

fect tense to signify that knowledge of God acquired in the past has enduring effects for the present. Present assurance that we have a share in eternal life with God (*en toutō ginōskomen*) integrally derives from prior acquisition of coming to know this life in God (*egnōkamen auton*).

⁴⁶John’s reference to Jesus Christ is frequently by way of a circumlocution, “That One” (*ekeinos*; 2:6; 3:3; 5, 7, 16; 4:17). Commentators seem lackluster and short on curiosity concerning the significance and origin of John’s circumlocution. It seems worthy of inquisitive inquiry, but left presently for another day.

⁴⁷For the origin and derivation of the designation “Christians,” see Acts 11:26 and commentaries on the passage. The term, *Christianos*, grammatically speaking, is a diminutive of *Christ*, hence, “little Christs.”

⁴⁸On the nature of the false teaching, see Burge, “Letters of John,” 589-90.

⁴⁹Concerning 1 John 2:18-19, some are bound to object that we have reasoned from one thing to another in an unwarranted, even mechanistic, manner. G. C. Berkouwer counters,

Yet, in this passage we are faced with the undeniable fact of John’s reasoning that if one did not remain with them, he had never been truly of them. For John, there is an unbreakable connection between *being* and *abiding*. However, it is necessary to ask upon what grounds John comes to his conclusion. Does he work with a simple scheme of causality and continuity, in terms of which he then reasons from *being* and *abiding*, and

from *not-remaining* to *not-being*? It appears to us that such purely objective, causal conclusions are altogether foreign to John’s epistle. It is not possible to abstract the relation between being and abiding according to John from his whole insight into faith, love, and being sons of God. This does not have to do with a causality of the fact of faith as such; for it is the significant thing about faith *that it does not exist in itself and cannot be seen apart from its content*. For this reason one can never separate John’s conclusion from the content of faith. John does not speculate about being and abiding as objective facts; but he speaks of them in connection with the grace and the love of God, in which believers participate through faith (*Faith and Perseverance* [trans. Robert D. Knudsen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 114).

⁵⁰Cf. Marshal, *The Epistles of John*, 153.

⁵¹See note 31 above.

⁵²Law, *Tests of Life*, 200.

⁵³The purpose clause that follows makes it clear that the “in him” refers to Christ. The phrase “in his coming” undoubtedly refers to Christ’s coming.

⁵⁴Law observes that fellowship with God entails God’s abiding in us and “as a necessary counterpart our abiding in Him. In this reciprocity of action, priority and causality belong, as always, to God, without whom we can do nothing; yet not so that the human activity is a mere automatic product of the Divine. . . . And when the word ‘abide’ (*menein*) is thus used, the idea of persistence or steadfast purpose, which is inherent in it, comes into view” (Law, *Tests of Life*, 199-200).

Concerning this relationship G. C.

Berkouwer correctly says, “We will never be able to understand these words if we see the divine preservation and our preservation of ourselves as mutually exclusive or as in a synthetic cooperation. Preserving ourselves is not an independent thing that is added paradoxically to the divine preservation. God’s preservation and our self-preservation do not stand in mere coordination, but in a marvelous way they *are* in correlation. One can formulate it best in this way: *our* preservation of ourselves is entirely oriented to *God’s* preservation of us” (*Faith and Perseverance*, 104).

⁵⁵On the relationship between God’s promise of salvation and his warnings or admonitions, see Thomas R. Schreiner and A. B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), esp. 142-213.

⁵⁶Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 116-117.