

God's Glory in God's Word

1 John Part 2: A Sin Leading to Death, a Comma, and the Whole World

A Sin Leading to Death

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life--to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (1Jn 5:16-17)

"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mar 3:28-30)

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Mat 12:32)

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1Jn 2:18-19)

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, **for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.** (1Jn 4:1-4)*

While there has been much discussion about the identity of this sin that leads to death, we should look for clues within the context of this letter. John has been particularly concerned throughout the letter with sins that show that one does not have eternal life abiding in him, that is, with sins that do, in fact, lead to death. John has particularly identified such sin as rejection of belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, unwillingness to obey God and pursue holiness, and failure to love fellow believers. Thus, Sin that leads to death is deliberate refusal to believe in Jesus Christ, to follow God's commands, and to love one's brothers. This was the behavior of those who were seeking to deceive John's hearers (2:26). This interpretation makes the most sense within the context of the letter.

Crossway. ESV® Expository Commentary--Hebrews-Revelation (Kindle Locations 13070-13072). Crossway.

A Comma: 1 John 5:6-8 – “Johannine Comma”

In this context, a “comma” means “short clause” – commas today are called commas, because they often separate short clauses.

I have included this passage to point out the controversy that exists concerning the inclusion or exclusion of a short clause that exists in the KJV but not in other English translations of 1 John.

ESV: This is he who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

NASB:This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

NIV: This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

KJV: This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. **For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth,** the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.(1Jn 5:6-8) KJV

“These words have been excluded from more recent translations because, as Dodd, 127 n.1, notes, they are “found in no Greek MS [manuscript] earlier than the fourteenth century, in no ancient Greek writer, in no ancient version other than the Latin, and in no early manuscripts of the Old Latin version or of Jerome’s Vulgate.” It seems most likely that the KJV formula was added to an early Latin version of 1 John as a marginal note, perhaps out of concern that no single NT verse directly supports the doctrine of the Trinity. The statement was gradually incorporated into the text, then translated from Latin to Greek and inserted into several Greek manuscripts in the early sixteenth century (cf. Marshall, 236 n.19).”

Garland, David E.. Hebrews - Revelation: 13 (The Expositor's Bible Commentary) (p. 494). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

The inclusion or exclusion of this phrase does not affect the doctrine of the Trinity.

Forgetting the comma for a moment, what is the point of the passage?

“The “water and blood” refer to the terminal points in Jesus’ earthly ministry: his baptism (water)190 and his crucifixion (blood). This is the best interpretation and is followed by most scholars. Historically, Jesus “came” into his power by the “water” of his baptism and even more so by the “blood” of his cross. Unlike the previous two views, this explanation fits the historical context of John's epistle. John writes this letter to counter the Gnostic tendencies of the false teachers. These false teachers, who at one time were part of the fellowship (2:19), were denying the humanity of Jesus, and so John emphasizes the reality of the Incarnation. John's further qualification that Jesus came “not by water only, but by water and blood” is likely a direct renunciation of the false teaching (perhaps that of Cerinthus) that claimed that Jesus was born an ordinary human being but became God's special agent when the heavenly Christ descended upon him at his baptism. The heavenly Christ abandoned him before his death and, consequently, it was only the earthly Jesus who died on the cross. In seeking to refute this teaching, John emphasizes that it was Jesus Christ who experienced both baptism and crucifixion.”

Akin, Dr. Daniel L.. 1,2,3 John (The New American Commentary) (pp. 196-197). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The Whole World

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only **but also for the sins of the whole world**. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1Jn 2:1-6)*

Many – including myself at one point in time – struggle to reconcile the doctrine of limited atonement with the usage of “whole world” in this passage. This is one of many cases where holding to the idea of the “analogy of Scripture” is important – i.e. let Scripture interpret Scripture. **What does other Scripture say about the sacrifice of Christ?**

1. The blood of the covenant is “poured out for **many** for the **forgiveness** of sins” – Matthew 26:28 – the purpose of the pouring out is for forgiveness of sins – not potential forgiveness. And the object is “many” – not “every single person”.
2. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep – John 10:11. Not everyone, as Jesus also makes clear that some do not believe because they are “not of my flock” – John 10:26.
3. Christ obtained the church of God with his own blood (Acts 20:28)
4. Christ gave himself up for the church (Eph 5:25)
5. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays – not for the world – but “for those whom you have given me” – John 17:9
6. He was made sin “for our sake” – 2 Corinthians 5:21
7. He gave himself “for our sins” Galatians 1:4
8. He became a curse “for us” Galatians 3:13

The rest of Scripture teaches Christ’s targeted, specific, sacrifice. In 1 John 2:2, we do not suddenly expand from us, the church, the sheep to every single human being. **But what of “the whole world”?** **Looking at the use of the phrase elsewhere in Scripture will help us to understand:**

Whole world is used as something less than every single spot on earth:

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as **indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing...** (Col 1:3-6a)*

Whole world is used as representing non-believers only:

*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, **the deceiver of the whole world**--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev 12:9)*

One must consider context to know how a phrase is intended – even with a phrase as seemingly straightforward as “whole world”. **And what is the context of 1 John 2:1-6?** Sinners have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous – v1. But note “if **anyone** does sin, we have an advocate...”. Again, we see a generic phrase that is limited in scope. Jesus is not an advocate for unbelievers. He is an advocate for the elect. Verses 3-6 make clear that John is distinguishing between the elect and the non-elect: *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is **interceding for us**. (Rom 8:33-34)*

Next Week: 2 & 3 John