

The Nature of Yeshua in the General Epistles

concludes that the Son is the “He” mentioned in 1 John 2:25, he also indicates how interconnected the work of the Father and the Son are in salvation:

“In 1 John the pronoun αὐτός [*autos*] (‘he’) usually refers to God or to Jesus (but see 3:24; 4:15). Here the allusion could be to either or both: eternal life is a pledge which is given to the believer *from God through Jesus*...This accords with the fact that both the Son and the Father are mentioned in v. 24. However, perhaps...the primary reference is to the promise, or pledge, of Jesus himself.”⁶²

1 John 3:19-24

“The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit”

“We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

Many people who believe in a plural Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, believe so on the basis of passages like 1 John 5:7, which in the King James Version reads as, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”⁶³ The authenticity of the statement made in the Greek Textus Receptus, the source text for the KJV, is denied by all Biblical scholars today, with the exception of various fundamentalists who regard the Textus Receptus as the only legitimate edition of the Greek New Testament to be used by God’s people. A version like the New American Standard, Updated Edition, employing more critical Greek resources, instead reads, “This is the One who came by water and blood, [Yeshua the Messiah]; 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.”

Philip W. Comfort offers the following summary, on what is commonly called the Johannine Comma, of 1 John 5:7, in his massive *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*:

John never wrote the following words: “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth.” This famous passage, called “the heavenly witnesses” or *Comma Johanneum*, came from a gloss on 5:8 which explained that the three elements (water, blood, and Spirit) symbolize the Trinity (the Father, the Word [Son], and the Spirit).

This gloss had a Latin origin...The first time this passage appears in the longer form (with the heavenly witness) is in the treatise *Liber Apologeticus*, written by the Spanish heretic Priscillian (died ca. 385) or his follower, Bishop Instantius. Metzger said, “apparently the gloss arose when the original passage was understood to symbolize the Trinity (although the mention of the three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood), an interpretation which may have been written first as a marginal note that afterwards founds its way into the text” (TCGNT). The gloss showed up in the writings of Latin Fathers in North Africa and Italy (as part of the text of the Epistle) from the fifth century onward, and found its way into more and more copies of the Latin Vulgate. (The original translation of Jerome did not include it.) “The heavenly witness” passage has not been found in the text of any Greek manuscript prior to the fourteenth century,

⁶² Smalley, 121.

⁶³ The NKJV similarly has, “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”

and it was never cited by any Greek father. Many of the Greek manuscripts...do not even include the extra verbiage in the text but rather record these words as a “variant reading” (v.r.) in the margin.

Erasmus did not include “the heavenly witnesses” passage into the first two editions of his Greek New Testament. He was criticized for this by defenders of the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus, in reply, said that he would include it if he could see it in any one Greek manuscript. In turn, a manuscript (most like the Monfort Manuscript, 61, of the sixteenth century) was especially fabricated to contain the passage and thereby fool Erasmus. Erasmus kept his promise; he included it in the third edition. From there it became incorporated into the TR and was translated in the KJV. Both KJV and NKJV have popularized this expanded passage. The NKJV translators included it in the text, knowing full well that it has no place there. This is evident in their footnote: “Only four or five very late manuscripts contain these words in Greek.” Its inclusion in the text demonstrates their commitment to maintain the KJV heritage.

Without the intrusive words the text reads: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement” (NIV). It has nothing to do with the Triune God, but with the three critical phases in Jesus’ live where he was manifested as God incarnate, the Son of God in human form. This was made evident at his baptism (=the water), his death (=blood), and his resurrection (=the Spirit). At his baptism, the man Jesus was declared God’s beloved Son (see Matt 3:16-17). At his crucifixion, a man spilling blood was recognized by others as “God’s Son” (see Mark 15:39). In resurrection, he was designated as the Son of God in power (see Rom 1:3-4). This threefold testimony is unified in one aspect: Each event demonstrated that the man Jesus was the divine Son of God.⁶⁴

Some Bible readers, for whatever reason, might think that if the KJV/NKJV reading of 1 John 5:7 is not authentic to the letter of 1 John, that any substantial reason for affirming a plural Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should thus be jettisoned. *Unfortunately, the understanding of some Bible readers as it concerns the nature of God, is rather simplistic and underdeveloped.* Our understanding of the nature of God hardly rises and falls on the textual issues of 1 John 5:7.

Earlier within John’s letter, in a place where there is no major textual dispute, one does in fact see some statements indicative of a plural Godhead. 1 John 3:19-22 makes light of the relationship that Believers have toward God, contextually deduced to be **the Father**:

“By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and set our heart at rest before Him whenever our heart condemns us. For God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Loved ones, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what is pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:19-22, TLV).

Continuing, John makes light of how Believers are to place their faith or trust in Yeshua the Messiah, **the Son**:

“Now this is His commandment—that we should believe in the name of His Son, Yeshua the Messiah, and love one another, just as He commanded us” (1 John 3:23, TLV).

Closing his remarks here, John affirms how those who keep the commandments, abiding in the Lord, abide in Him precisely because of the presence of **the Holy Spirit** accessible to them:

“The one who keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. We know that He

⁶⁴ Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 785.

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abides in us by this—by the Spirit He has given us” (1 John 3:24, TLV).

While it may be true that the reference to “the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost” is inauthentic to the original reading of 1 John 5:7—a revealed tri-unity of God is present in 1 John 3:19-24.

1 John 4:1-2

“Yeshua the Messiah Come in the Flesh”

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God.”

Many of us, in diverse religious settings, have quoted or have been quoted the strict admonition of 1 John 4:1: “Dear friends, don’t trust every spirit. On the contrary, test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (CJB/CJSB). Generally speaking, we know from some of the wider issues discussed in the Epistle of 1 John, that false prophets are those who would speak or declare something significantly blasphemous against Yeshua the Messiah and His atoning work. In 1 John 4:2, as the NIV puts it, “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” The key statement of importance is *pan pneuma ho homologeï Iēsoun Christon en sarki elēluthota ek tou Theou estin* (πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν), “every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ in [the] flesh having come of – God is” (Brown and Comfort).⁶⁵

Much of the contemporary discussion and debate over the nature of Yeshua, involves whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is uncreated as the eternal Son of God, who is God, integrated into the Divine Identity. In 1 John 4:2, the debate present was “that Yeshua the Messiah came as a human being” (CJB/CJSB) or “that Jesus Christ came in a real body” (NLT). With some degree of late First Century background issues present, the Apostle John saw it necessary here to denounce as antimessiah those who denied “that Messiah Yeshua has come in human flesh” (TLV): “and every spirit that does not confess Yeshua is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antimessiah, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:3).

What late First Century problem was in view, which denied that Yeshua the Messiah had come in human flesh? Examiners have proposed a number of possibilities, among the various heresies and aberrant teachings circulating in the late First and early Second Centuries C.E., particularly those in which physical matter was treated as evil. A denial of Yeshua’s humanity, is not only a denial of Yeshua showing His followers how to live properly as human beings in relationship to their Creator—but it is a stark denial of Yeshua’s sacrifice on the tree for human sin. A fairly standard evangelical Christian approach to 1 John 4:2 is offered by Marshall:

“[T]he emphasis lies on the reality of the incarnation, the fact that the Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14; cf. 6:51-55). There was a true union of the divine Word, the Son of God, with a human personality in Jesus Christ. With the NIV rendering the stress is more on belief in the fact of the incarnation as a historical event; with the alternative rendering the stress is rather on the human ‘state’ of Jesus, and indeed on his continuing state. The incarnation was not a temporary event but the permanent union of God and man in Jesus Christ. Moreover, to say that Jesus Christ came ‘in the flesh’ is to say that he was truly united with human flesh rather than that he merely

⁶⁵ Brown and Comfort, pp 836-837.