

Textual Variants in 1 John

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1 John 1:4 γράφομεν ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν

And these *things we write, in order that our joy may be complete.*

Some witnesses have “we write, in order that our joy,” but other witnesses have “we write to you, in order that your joy.” These variations usually occur together, combining to shift the focus from a group that includes the writer and the readers to a group that consists of just the readers.

1 John 2:6 περιπατεῖν

The one who says *that he* resides in him ought also **to walk** just as that one walked.

Some manuscripts have “to walk in this way” instead of simply “to walk.” The textual evidence is mixed. The construction is grammatically awkward, so “in this way” may have been dropped. Alternately, it may have been added for stylistic reasons.

1 John 2:7 Ἀγαπητοί

Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the message which you have heard.

Some manuscripts have “Brothers” instead of “Dear friends.” These words are similar in the underlying Greek. In the New Testament, use of “Dear friends” as a form of address is less common than “Brothers,” so a scribe may have inadvertently reverted to the more common form of address.

1 John 2:7 ἠκούσατε

Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the message which **you have heard.**

At the end of the verse, some manuscripts include “from the beginning.” The textual evidence for this variation is largely found in later manuscripts.

1 John 2:18 ἀντίχριστος

Children, it is the last hour, and just as you have heard that **antichrist** is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen, by which we know that it is the last hour.

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Some manuscripts directly specify “the antichrist,” while others have an indefinite reference to “an antichrist” or simply “antichrist.” The definite/indefinite difference is not absolute; Greek grammar is very flexible in this matter. Even without a definite identifier, the context clearly points to the expected antichrist instead of some generic antichrist. It is possible that later scribes attempted to clarify this.

1 John 2:20 οἶδατε πάντες

And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and **you all know**.

The textual evidence is divided between “you all know” and “you know everything.” The difference in translation separates specifying who knows about the anointing and what is known about the anointing.

1 John 2:25 ἐπηγγείλατο ἡμῖν

And this is the promise which he himself **promised us**: eternal life.

Most manuscripts have “promised us,” but a few manuscripts have “promised to you.”

1 John 3:1 τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν καὶ ἐσμέν

See what sort of love the Father has given to us: that **we should be called children of God, and we are!** Because of this the world does not know us: because it did not know him.

Early manuscripts have “we should be called children of God, and we are!” Other manuscripts and related later witnesses, however, simply have “we should be called children of God.”

1 John 3:5 τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρη

And you know that that one was revealed in order that **he might take away sins**, and in him *there* is no sin.

The manuscript evidence is divided between “take away sins” and “take away our sins.” The presence of the pronoun “our” may be harmonization with similar phrasing in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. Theologically, the presence of the pronoun “our” localizes the sin to those of the author and addressees (so, to believers) while the generic “take away sins” would apply more generally to the sins of all.

1 John 3:14 ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν

We know that we have passed over from death to life because we love the brothers. **The one who does not love** remains in death.

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A few early manuscripts and later witnesses related to them specify the object of the love in the second clause, “who does not love his brother;” but most early manuscripts do not. When of “his brother” is present, love is directed to brothers and sisters in Christ instead of generally applying love to everyone in all situations.

1 John 4:3 μή ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν

and every spirit that **does not confess Jesus** is not from God, and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, *of* which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Instead of “does not confess Jesus,” some manuscripts have “does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.” The longer reading converts a generic denial of Jesus into a specific denial about him coming in the flesh.

1 John 4:19 ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν

We love, because he first loved us.

Instead of “we love,” some manuscripts have “we love God” and still other manuscripts have “we love him.” The longer readings provide an object for the love, either “him” or “God,” while the shorter reading leaves the statement generic.

1 John 4:20 οὐ δύναται

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar, for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen **is not able** to love God whom he has not seen.

Most early manuscripts have “is not able,” while some other manuscripts and related later witnesses have “how can he.” The first is a general statement of fact, while the second expresses the same idea as a rhetorical question.

1 John 5:7 οἱ μαρτυροῦντες

For *there* are three **that testify**,

Most manuscripts end the verse with “testify,” but some late manuscripts have “testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. [8] And there are three that bear witness on earth.” Only four late Greek manuscripts and a small number of Latin manuscripts contain this reading.

1 John 5:8 τὸ πνεῦμα

the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.

Most manuscripts begin the verse with “the Spirit,” but some late manuscripts have “testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. [8] And there are

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three that bear witness on earth.” Only four late Greek manuscripts and a small number of Latin manuscripts contain this reading.

1 John 5:13 ζῶν ἔχετε αἰώνιον

These *things* I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that **you have eternal life**.

Most manuscripts have “eternal life,” but some later witnesses include “and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” This effectively adds a second purpose for the letter.

1 John 5:18 τηρεῖ αὐτόν

We know that everyone who is fathered by God does not sin, but the one fathered by God, **he protects him**, and the evil one does not touch him.

Witnesses are split between “he protects him” and “he protects himself,” the difference being the pronoun which serves as object of the verb. In the first reading, the subject of the verb is understood to be God, and “him” is the one fathered by God (the believer). In the second reading, the subject of the verb is understood to be believer, and the pronoun then also refers to the believer.

1 John 5:20 τὸν ἀληθινόν

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, in order that we may know **the one who is true**, and we are in the one who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life.

Instead of “the one who is true,” some manuscripts read “the true God.” The first reading keeps the identity of “the one who is true” implicit, while the second explicitly reveals the identity, which is also made clear at the end of the verse.

1 John 5:21 εἰδώλων

Little children, guard yourselves from **idols**.

Some manuscripts end the book with “Amen.”