

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE STRUCTURE OF 1 JOHN

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ABSTRACT: 1 John is found to consist of small subunits delineated by repetitions of words and rhetorical structures, especially three-fold repetitions. In these subunits keywords are identified which facilitate and emphasise the conveyance of meaning in the subunit. Subunits are connected to neighbouring subunits by link words or ideas allowing a flow of meaning. A process is outlined to group these subunits together into larger units, to map the flow of thought through the book and to provide an overall schema of 1 John.¹

The structure of 1 John has been much debated, and there are almost as many schemas proposed as there are commentators.² Parker states the

¹ This article is based on work from my BTh honours dissertation, *The Structure and Meaning of 1 John*, Charles Sturt University, 2001. A similar article appears in the ejournal of the Brisbane College of Theology (not peer-reviewed) Archē, used with permission.

² See I.H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 22-27 for a comprehensive summary of different schemas prior to his commentary. F. Segovia "Recent Research in the Johannine Letters," *Religious Studies Review* 13 (1987) 132-39, here 133-34, reviews the structural proposals of 6 commentators from the 1980's. P.J. van Staden, "The debate on the structure of 1 John," *Harvard Theological Studies* 47 (1991) 487-502 also provides a review of proposed structures. Of particular significance in terms of reflecting a variety of approaches are those of T. Häring, "Gedankengang und Grundgedanke des ersten Johannesbriefes," in A. Harnack et al (eds.), *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weizsäcker zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag, 11. Dezember 1892 gewidmet* (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1892) 173-200, here 184-87; R. Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909); E. Lohmeyer, "Über Aufbau und Gliederung des ersten

difficulty: “[1 John] reads like an old man’s anxious exhortations to his flock. (Indeed 1 John makes almost as good sense when read backwards, sentence by sentence!).”³

Brown also notes the complications: “The author’s logic is so obscure that one could move around units almost at will and still 1 John would read just as well as it does now ... Faced with such lack of sequence, many scholars resort to positing free association of ideas (de Ambroggi), spirals of arguments or cyclic thinking (Houlden, Malatesta), or, more mysteriously, 'Semitic thought patterns.' Finally some have announced that it is useless to seek a pattern or structure (Brooke, Hauck, Holtzmann, Julicher, Reuss, Rothe, to name a few).”⁴

Various authors have sought to determine patterns of thought divisions throughout the book, e.g. righteousness, love, faith - proposed by Law;⁵ or

Johannesbriefes,” *ZNW* 27 (1928) 225-63; C.H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946); P. Thompson, “Psalm 119: A Possible Clue to the Structure of the First Epistle of John,” *Studia Evangelica* 2 (Texte und Untersuchungen Zur Geschichte Der Altchristlichen Literatur 87; Berlin: Akademie, 1964); E. Malatesta, *The Epistles of St. John. Greek Text and English Translation Schematically Arranged* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1973), R. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 11-13 and J.C. Thomas, *The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 John 2 John 3 John* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004). Brown provides a comprehensive summary of 27 proposed outlines representing 59 authors. See R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1982) 764. Painter also summarises the key proposals. See J. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SacPag 18; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002) 116 – 118.

³ P. Parker, “Two Editions of John,” *JBL* 75 (1956) 303-14, here 303.

⁴ Brown, *Epistles* 117.

⁵ R. Law, *Tests*.

sin, love, faith – proposed by Tomoi,⁶ or Smalley's structural schema based on the conditions of living in the light and living as children of God.⁷ The difficulty of all these approaches occurs in chapters 3 – 5, a section which does not easily conform to simple patterns.

Others have sought to base 1 John's structure on other works, e.g. Thompson who proposes that it is based on Psalm 119,⁸ while Brown sees a basis in the Gospel of John.⁹ Such investigations do not produce any tight structure.

Schnackenburg correctly warns against attempts to trace too neat a scheme.¹⁰ Strecker continues along this line: “But for the most part 1 John is seen as a relatively loose series of various trains of thought hung together on the basis of association.”¹¹

As can be seen from the brief summary above, there is a great diversity of approaches, most of which have proved helpful in understanding the construction of 1 John. As many commentators have concluded, thoughts appear to flow through 1 John in a not so tightly structured way, suggesting that the quest for a neat schema may prove fruitless.

⁶ K. Tomoi, “The Plan to the First Epistle of John,” *ExpTim* 52 (1940-41) 117-19.

⁷ S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* (Waco: Word Biblical Commentary, 1984) xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁸ P. Thompson, *Psalm 119*.

⁹ Brown, *Epistles* 123-29.

¹⁰ Schnackenburg, *Epistles* 13.

¹¹ G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) xliii.

ANOTHER APPROACH

The proposal in this article stems from a different approach. It arises from the observation of the stylistic nature of 1 John. The process does not begin by attempting to understand and group the topics raised in 1 John and from there proposing a schema to describe the flow of these themes. Instead, it commences with the observation of the flow of words and literary structures. From here it becomes apparent that a structure does emerge which facilitates the description of the movement of thought throughout the Epistle.¹² Various other patterns begin to emerge with this approach, including a clue to the general layout of the Epistle highlighting key themes, and importantly also a platform whereby meaningful intertextual readings with the Gospel of John may be undertaken.

Malatesta suggests a way forward in investigating the thought flow of 1 John by paying attention to the literary traits.¹³ Loader notes the author's style and its relation to structure.¹⁴ He observes inclusios (e.g. 1:5–7 and 2:9–11). He also notes that the author ends one section with a hint of the theme in the section to follow (e.g. 2:11 and 2:28). The author shows “a marked preference for grouping material in threes ... But should we look for that as a major determining factor in the structure?”¹⁵

¹² Throughout this article, purely for sake of convenience, I shall refer to 1 John as an “epistle” without discussing the problematic issue of its genre.

¹³ E. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant* (Analecta Biblica; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978) 39.

¹⁴ W. Loader, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Epworth Press, 1992) xii.

¹⁵ Loader, *Epistles* xiii.

Loader's trailing question proves to be significant in the analysis of the movement of meaning. Both Malatesta and Loader are correct in connecting structure and style. This line of investigation and the rhetorical analysis of the Johannine Epistles by Watson using ancient techniques of rhetoric, actually point to another method of structural analysis.¹⁶

Watson's thorough rhetorical analysis will not be repeated here, however it is pertinent to note for this study the author's use of some of the ancient rhetorical amplification techniques. Of particular relevance for this paper are *expolitio*, *conduplicatio*, *apanaphora*, polysyndeton/asyndeton, antithesis, synonymy. Such figures of thought are especially valuable in the amplification of the basic ideas or topics of a speaker or writer.

These particular features of rhetorical style in 1 John prominently feature the use of repetition for amplification and emphasis.¹⁷ They also serve to make contrasts between good and evil, walking in the light and walking in darkness, being in the world and being a child of God, loving or hating each other. Watson's rhetorical analysis is pertinent to the following discussion of the development of subunits in 1 John.

¹⁶ D. Watson, "1 John 2:12-14 as Distributio, Conduplicatio, and Expolitio: A Rhetorical Understanding," *JSNT* 35 (1989) 97-110; and D. Watson, "Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention," *JSNT* 51 (1993) 99-123.

¹⁷ B. Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume 1: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006) 435.

SUBUNITS AND KEYWORDS IN 1 JOHN

As one reads 1 John 2:12–13, one cannot help but notice the three-fold structure surrounding the repetition of *graphō hymin* (“I write to you”) followed by a vocative (“children”, “fathers” or “young ones”) followed by a *hoti* clause. This pattern is repeated in verse 14 with slight changes and developments. This significant passage provides a clue that the author is not averse to using structure in this writing (and also simultaneously and importantly that patterns are not tight).

It is the proposal of this paper that 1 John can be divided into subunits. These subunits are generally 1 to 3 verses in length. A key factor in the identification of these subunits is the structured nature of the text. Indeed, a number of devices (antitheses, chiasms, repetitions) appear (usually) three times in close proximity.¹⁸ Certain words particularly seem to be repeated throughout the subunit, usually three times. This pattern is determinative for identifying discrete subunits throughout 1 John. This process shall be outlined below following a discussion of the rhetorical analysis of 1 John.

As one reads 1 John one notices that the writer tends to convey ideas in small units rather than larger structures. The author would convey one or

¹⁸ Several commentators have observed the attraction of the writer to the number three. For example, Brown, *Epistles* 123, 294, Watson, *1 John 2:12-14* 99, Loader, *Epistles* xiii.

two ideas in a few verses and would then convey a different (but usually related) idea in the next few verses.

An analysis of the author's use of vocabulary confirms the repetition pattern. For example, the word *didaskō* ("teach") is used only three times in 1 John. These occurrences are restricted solely to 2:26–27. Similarly *arneomai* ("deny") occurs only three times, every occurrence is in the subunit 2:22–23. *kardia* ("heart") occurs only four times, three in the subunit 3:19–20 and once in the adjacent subunit 3:21–23.

While it might be argued that such a distribution is to be expected if an author discusses a specialised topic over two or three verses, a closer analysis of the specialised use of such vocabulary suggests a pattern appears. It is quite apparent, as Watson has demonstrated, that the author relies heavily on *expolitio* and *conduplicatio*.¹⁹ For example, while the author refers to "the evil one" (*ho panēros*) several times e.g. 3:12 and 5:18, *diabolos* ("devil") is used only four times: three times in the subunit 3:7–8 and once in the adjacent subunit 3:9–10. The adjective *alēthinos* ("true") is used only four times in 1 John, three of which are used repetitively in subunit 5:20–21. The use of three forms of *gennaō* ("bear") in the subunit 5:1 illustrates a deliberate play on words, especially as the author could have written such a sentence differently (e.g. with the author's more usual use of *teknon*, *teknion*, or *paidion*).

¹⁹ Watson, *Amplification*.

While key words in other subunits are more frequent in 1 John’s overall vocabulary, the author’s choice of words is noticeable in the subunits. For example, in 5:2–3, one cannot fail to notice the awkward and otherwise overly repetitive use of *entolē* (“command”). While *menō* (“abide”) is extremely frequent in 1 John, the three-fold variation of the pattern *en autō menomen kai autos en hymīn* (“abide in him and he in us”) in the subunit 4:13–16 is unique.

The subunits are not defined simply by one repetitive word. Often a grammatical structure or phrase is repeated. For example, 3:3–6 shows a repetition:

pas ho echōn / pas ho poiōn / pas ho menōn / pas ho hamartanōn

Sometimes there is a three-fold repetition in the subunit, however one of the words is changed to its opposite. For example in 1:6–7 there is the pattern: *en tō skotei / en tō phōti / en tō phōti* (“in the dark”/“in the light”/“in the light”). In some subunits another word as well as the keyword is repeated. In 2:16–17, besides the three-fold repetition of *kosmos* (“world”) there is also the unusually repetitive *epithymia* (“desire”) (The only three occurrences of this word in 1 John are in this subunit.)

In 1:6–2:2 Brown notes the series of three paired antitheses.²⁰ Each pair forms a subunit. While each subunit contains keywords which are repeated throughout the subunit (*en tō skotei/ phōti; hamartia; hamartanō* respectively) the rhetorical structure (antithesis) dominates the definition of the subunit, especially as the pattern of boasting followed by its counter positive statement is repeated three times through 1:6–2:2.

Often the subunit contains a statement followed or preceded by an antithesis or other rhetorical structure (e.g. chiasm), for example the subunit 2:20–21. The statement (v20) introduces the thought expressed in the antithesis, which is then further developed in v21c.

LINKING BETWEEN SUBUNITS

In almost every subunit there is a word which connects with the next subunit i.e. it is repeated in the next subunit. Sometimes this link word (or words) is used as the key of the next unit. For example, 2:7–8, while mainly discussing the new and old commandment, finishes with a sentence which raises the idea of *phōs* (“light”) and *skotiā* (“darkness”) which is the key in the next subunit.

Sometimes the link is more an idea rather than a particular word, e.g. 5:2–3, where *tekna* (“child”) appears to link with *gegennēmenoī* (“born”) in the next subunit (an example of *expolitio*). Sometimes the link word is in a

²⁰ Brown, *Epistles* 196.

different form to the connection in the next unit. For example *pseudos* (“lie”) in 2:20–21 links with *pseustēs* (“liar” in the next subunit.

DIVISION OF 1 JOHN INTO SUBUNITS

From the above discussion, it becomes apparent that the entire epistle can be divided into subunits. Table 1 is a proposal for such a division. In this table, for each subunit, the keyword(s) and link word(s) are listed along with rhetorical structures in the subunit.

TABLE ONE:

SUBUNIT STRUCTURE OF 1 JOHN

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
1:1	<i>ho</i> (4x)	<i>zōē</i>	Fourfold repetition plus additional phrase “concerning the word of life”. The first and last phrases frame the central 3 phrases each commencing with <i>ho</i> immediately followed by verb in first person pl.
1:2	<i>kai heōrakamen</i> <i>kai martyroumen</i> <i>kai apaggellomen</i>	<i>heōrakamen</i> <i>apaggellomen</i>	Subunit outlined by an inclusio of <i>ephanerōthē</i> and <i>zōē</i> around a 3-fold structure each commencing with <i>kai</i> followed by 3 rd person plural verb.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
1:3-5	<i>apaggellomen</i> <i>aggelia</i> <i>anaggellomen</i>	<i>phōs / skotia</i> although 5c forms a bridge to the next	Phrases commencing <i>ho / kai /kai / kai</i> connecting back to prev. units. “us” and “you” is stressed. Movement from “us” to “you” and development of concept of fellowship. 3-fold repetition of verbs in 1 st person
also	<i>apaggellomen</i> <i>graphomen</i> <i>anaggellomen</i>	subunit	
plural. Also	<i>hymeis</i> (3x), <i>hēmeis</i> (3x), <i>meta</i> (3x)		3-fold repetition of <i>meta</i>
1:6-7	<i>en tō skotei/</i> <i>en tō phōti/</i> <i>en tō phōti</i> <i>autos</i> (3x)	<i>hamartia</i>	Beginning pair of 3 pairs of antitheses, each beginning with a boast, then antithesis, then extra statement.
1:8-9	<i>hamartia</i> (3x) <i>hēmeis</i> (3x)	<i>hamartia</i>	ditto
1:10-2:2	<i>hamartanō</i> (3x) <i>hēmeis / hēmeteros</i> (3x)	<i>autos</i> (<i>Iēsous</i>) (weak)	ditto Plus parenthesis (2: 1a,b).
2:3-6	<i>entolas autou ... tērōmen</i> <i>entolas autou ... tērōn</i> <i>tērē autou ton logon</i> <i>autos</i> (6x) <i>en toutō</i> (4x)	<i>entolē</i> <i>logos</i>	Inclusio (<i>en toutō ginōskomen</i> <i>hoti</i>) surrounding antithesis about keeping commandments/ his word followed by extra statement.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
2:7-8	<i>entolēn kainēn</i> <i>entolēn palaian</i> <i>entolēn kainēn</i> (plus <i>hē entolē hē palaia</i>) <i>hymīn</i> (3x)	<i>phōs / skotia</i>	Rough chiasm (but definite article usage slightly stressing the old commandment and its description), followed by qualification about darkness/light.
2:9-11	<i>en tē skotia</i> (3x) <i>ton adelphon autou</i> (plus <i>misōn/agapōn</i> - 3x)	No link	3 lines each commencing <i>ho</i> + participle following theme of hate brother / love brother / hate brother plus further development in third line.
2:12-14	<i>graphō hymīn</i> (3x) <i>egrapsa hymīn</i> (3x) <i>patēr</i> (3x)	<i>patēr</i> <i>patēr</i>	3-fold repetitious structure “I write to you” followed by 3 groups of people. v14 almost identical as 12-13 with change from <i>teknia</i> to <i>paidia</i> ; tense of <i>graphō</i> changes to aorist, plus further addition to the text.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
2:15	<i>kosmos</i> (3x) <i>agapaō</i> / <i>agapaō</i> / <i>agapē</i> <i>en</i> is significant	<i>kosmos</i> <i>patēr</i>	Almost antithetical statements. Command followed by opposite condition. “Do not love ...” followed by “If any loves ...”
2:16-17	<i>kosmos</i> (3x) <i>epithymia</i> (3x) <i>ek</i> is significant	<i>eis ton aiōna</i> links weakly with <i>eschatē hōra</i> (2:18)	Inclusio of “world” around v16 with movement from <i>en tō kosmō</i> to <i>ek tou patros / ek tou kosmou</i> . There is repetition of theme of <i>epithymia / epithymia / alazoneia</i> enclosed within this structure. Development in v17 linked to v16 by <i>kosmos</i> and <i>epithymia</i> , and <i>en</i> and <i>ek</i> develop to <i>eis ton aiōna</i> .
2:18-19	<i>ex hēmōn</i> (4x)	<i>antichristos</i> cf <i>chrisma</i> (v20) <i>pas</i>	v18 chiasm and v19 repetitive phrases around the key words.
2:20-21	<i>oida</i> (3x)	<i>pseudos</i>	A statement followed by an antithesis.
2:22-23	<i>ho arnoumenos</i> (3x) <i>patēr kai huios</i> (3x ea)	<i>patēr kai huios</i>	v22 parallel statements <i>Tis estin ho ... arnoumenos ... houtos estin ho ... arnoumenos ...</i> followed by antithesis in v23.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
2:24-25	<i>menō en</i> (3x) <i>hymeis</i> (5x)	<i>menō</i>	V24a is a chiasm with some emphasis on <i>hymeis</i> followed by statement .
2:26-27	<i>didaskō</i> (3x)	<i>menete en autō</i>	Statement followed by chiasm.
2:28-3:2	(e) <i>phanerōthē</i> (3x) <i>ginōskō</i> (3x) NB also <i>oida</i> (2x)	<i>phanerōthē</i> links with centre of the next subunit	Command v28a followed by rough chiasm. centred on 3:1b
3:3-6	<i>pas ho echōn</i> <i>pas ho poiōn</i> <i>pas ho menōn</i> <i>pas ho hamartanōn</i> plus <i>hamartia</i> (4x)	<i>phanerōthē</i>	5-fold sentence structure 4 of which commencing as per key words. Similar to chiasm with centre sentence.
3:7-8	<i>dikaiousunē</i> / <i>dikaios</i> / <i>dikaios</i> plus <i>diabolos</i> (3x)	<i>diabolos</i> <i>phanerōthē</i> links with 3:10	Parallel sentences contrasting righteousness and the devil, plus statement.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB- UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
3:9-10	<i>ek tou theou</i> (3x)	<i>adelphos</i> <i>agapaō</i>	5-fold structure: <i>pas ho ...</i> <i>kai ...</i> middle sentence.. <i>pas ho ...</i> <i>kai ...</i>
3:11-13	<i>ponēros /</i> <i>ponēros /</i> <i>dikaios</i>	<i>adelphos</i>	Command followed by chiasm followed by vocative contrasting v11.
3:14-15	<i>agapōmen tous adelphous</i> <i>agapōn (adelphous)</i> <i>misōn ton adelphon</i>	<i>adelphos</i>	Rough chiasm centred on v14c.
3:16-18	<i>agapēn /</i> <i>agapē /</i> <i>agapōmen</i>	<i>alētheia</i>	3-fold structure v16 parallel repetition of <i>psuchēn ... ethēken</i> <i>psuchas ... theinai</i> v17 develops around repetition of <i>autos</i> v18 imperative.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
:19-20	<i>kardia</i> (3x)	<i>kardia</i> <i>kataginōskō</i>	Statement (19a) as well as chiasm centred on 20a.
3:21-23	<i>entolē</i> (3x)	<i>entolē</i>	Statement (21) followed by 3 statements with predominance of 3 rd pers. pl verbs plus <i>autos</i> with following sentence (23) outlined by an inclusio.
3:24	<i>en autō menei</i> <i>(menei) en autō</i> <i>menei en hēmin</i>	<i>pneuma</i> (weak link)	Threefold repetition of idea of mutual remaining (24a,b,c) plus development (24d).
4:1-3	<i>(pneuma) ek tou theou</i> (3x) <i>pneuma</i> (5x)	<i>kosmos</i>	“World” inclusio around “in this” statement followed by antithesis (2b, 3a), followed by “this is” statement.
4:4-6	<i>ek tou theou</i> (3x) <i>kosmos</i> (3x) <i>akouō</i> (3x)	<i>ek tou theou</i>	3-fold structure each commencing with <i>hymeis/autoi/hymeis ek tou theou</i> followed by antithesis (6bc) and statement (6d).
4:7-8	<i>agapaō</i> (3x) <i>theos</i> (5x)	<i>agapē</i> <i>theos</i>	Command (7a) plus chiasm.

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
4:9-10	<i>theos</i> (3x) <i>agap-</i> (4x)	<i>theos</i> <i>agapē</i>	Parallel sentence structure with each commencing <i>en toutō</i> ... Each also mentions God sending the Son.
4:11-12	<i>theos</i> (3x) <i>agapaō</i> (3x)	<i>menō en</i>	Rough chiasmic structure can be shown graphically: if God → us (11a) then us → one another (11b) centre: no-one has seen God if us → one another (12b) then God → us.
4:13-16	<i>en autō menomen, kai autos en hēmin</i> <i>en autō menei kai autos en tō theō</i> <i>en tō theō menei kai ho theos en autō</i> <i>agapē</i> (3x)	<i>agapē</i>	3 sentences about mutual abiding (vv13, 15, 16c,d,e) interspersed with two verses each commencing <i>kai hymeis</i> .
4:17-18	<i>agapē</i> (4x) <i>teteleiōtai / teleia / teteleiōtai</i> <i>phobos</i> (3x)	<i>agapē</i>	Rough chiasm centring on <i>teleia agapē</i> (18b).

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
4:19-21	<i>adelphon autou misē</i> <i>agapōn ton adelphon autou</i> <i>agapa ton adelphon autou</i>	<i>theos</i> Weak link	Statement (19) followed by chiasm as outlined as follows: loving God/hating brother/sister not loving seen brother/sister not loving unseen God loving God/loving brother/sister
5:1	<i>gennaō</i> (3x)	<i>gegennēmenon ex autou</i> (links with <i>tekna tou theou</i>)	2 statements. In the second (15b) there is repetition of <i>agapaō</i> and <i>gennaō</i> .
5:2-3	<i>entolai autou</i> (3x) <i>agap-</i> (3x)	<i>tekna</i> (links with <i>gegennēmenon</i> v4)	2 parallel statements ending “his commands doing/keeping” plus development. (3c)
5:4-5	<i>nikaō ton kosmon</i> (3x)	<i>Iēsous</i>	3 statements around the theme “victory over the world.” plus development (5b).
5:6-8	<i>hydōr kai haima</i> (3x) <i>pneuma</i> (3x)	<i>martyreō</i>	3 parallel pairs of statements each with repetitions. 6ab: repetition of <i>hydōr kai haima</i> 6cd: repetition of <i>pneuma estin</i> 7,8: repetition of <i>treis eisin</i> as inclusio around <i>to pneuma kai to haima</i>

TABLE 1 (ctd)

SUB-UNIT	KEYWORD(S) (frequency)	LINK WORDS	STRUCTURE
5:9	<i>martyria tōn anthrōpōn</i> <i>martyria tou theou</i> <i>martyria tou theou</i>	<i>huios autou</i> links <i>huios</i> <i>tou theou</i>	Comparison (9ab) plus development (9cd).
5:10	<i>pisteuō</i> (3x) <i>martyr-</i> (3x)	<i>martyria</i>	Antithesis (10a,b) plus development (10c).
5:11-12	<i>huios</i> (3x) <i>zōē</i> (4x)	<i>echō zōēn</i>	Statement (11) plus antithesis (12).
5:13-15	<i>aiteō</i> (3x) <i>oida</i> (3x)	<i>aiteō</i>	Statement (13) plus chiasm centred on pairs (14b and 15a)
5:16-17	<i>hamartia pros thanaton</i> (3x) + <i>hamartanō pros thanaton</i> (1x) <i>hamartia estin</i> (3x)	<i>hamartia</i>	3 statements finishing "not to death" around central statement beginning <i>estin hamartia</i> and ending <i>hamartia estin</i>
5:18-19	<i>ek tou theou</i> (3x)	<i>ek tou theou</i> (links <i>Teknia</i>) <i>oidamen</i>	Rough chiasm with <i>oidamen hoti ... ek tou theou ...</i> on outside with inside antithesis (18bc) with "keeping" and "holding" plus statement (19b).
5:20-21	<i>alēthinos</i> (3x)		Chiasm ("son" / "true one" / "true one" / "son")

plus statement (20e) plus

command (21).

The keyword(s) appear to perform 2 main functions. Firstly they relate to the central idea of the subunit, or “hold it together” in the subunit. For example, in 4:1–3, *ek tou theou* (“from God”) is the key. While the subject is “spirits”, and while several ideas are introduced in this subunit, the critical theme is that the spirits be investigated to determine if they are indeed “of/from God.” This links in with the next subunit, 4:4–6, where the same words again are the key, yet now the subject has changed to “you” and “we” being “of/from God.” Notice that more than one idea may be introduced in a subunit, however the keyword(s) is the common denominator in the development of meaning. For example, the three forms of *gennaō* (“bear”) in 5:1 connect the argument of being a child of God, loving God and therefore loving the child of God. The keyword relates directly to the meaning of the subunit.

At times the keywords act to develop the idea throughout the subunit. For example, in 3: 7–8 *dikaios* and *diabolos* are contrasted with each other in order to contrast the ideas of righteousness and the devil, which is then further developed to the idea of the Son undoing the works of the devil.

Secondly, the repetition of the keyword acts to emphasise the meaning of the passage. In 1:1 the repetition of *ho* keeps one in suspense and accentuates not only the perceiving of the proclamation but the content – the word of

life. The repetition of *alēthinos* in the final subunit of 1 John (5:20–21) highlights the message of the true God and the Son – a message which the author wishes to emphasise in the whole book against the falsehood of the deceivers. The repetition of "true" also works to contrast with "idols" in v21, the latter being associated with falsehood. Thus, using the keyword and idea, the highlighted sense of the "true God" contrasts well with "idols" and combines the two verses together to form an appropriate and emphatic conclusion to the book.

The subunits express a development of ideas in discrete units and illustrate a general flow of thought. The use of these discrete subunits demonstrate why scholars have (correctly) described the flow in 1 John as "repetitive" (e.g. Houlden),²¹ or "uneven and difficult" (Rensberger).²² Such issues may now be explored further.

The link words make the connections throughout 1 John. Loader notes that the author ends one section with a "hint of the theme of the section to follow", using 2:11 and 2:28 as examples.²³ Brown highlights the existence of "hinge verses" – verses that end a section and begin another by having themes of both. "Such verses facilitate transitions but make precise

²¹ J.L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973) 22.

²² D. Rensberger, *1 John 2 John 3 John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 32.

²³ Loader, *Epistles* xii.

demarcations and divisions difficult.”²⁴ This linking, which Brown and Loader have identified, occurs throughout 1 John.

The link words ensure a flow of thought throughout the book. They prevent the subunits being too disjointed as they are combined together, and allow several individual ideas to be linked together, with a relatively smooth flow of ideas over a number of subunits. An example is 4:7–12 where the intertwining themes of "love" and “God” flow across the subunits, not just because of the keywords, but also the link words. Thus the link words are significant in mapping the flow of thought through passages in 1 John. (They don't have an exclusive role in this. Other words and ideas also help to connect the individual ideas together.)

FROM SUBUNITS TO UNITS

As one examines the subunits it is apparent that while generally links are strong between subunits, sometimes they are tenuous and sometimes there is no apparent link word at all. For example 2:9–11 has no link with the next subunit 2:12–14.

The breaks between subunits where there is no link, or only a weak link, indicate a break between units at a higher level. Thus, using the above example, it is proposed that there is a section break between 2:11 and 2:12. Similarly there is a section break between 2:17 and 2:18 ("live forever" in

²⁴ Brown, *Epistles* 119.

2:17 links only weakly with "last hour" in 2:18). *Pneuma* provides only a weak link between 3:24 and 4:1 suggesting a new unit beginning in Chapter 4.

If one uses keywords and link words, gathering together subunits with similar words into larger units, one can develop a schema of units relating to the flow of thought. For example, the subunits in 4:7–12 could be gathered together to form a unit, centred on the prevalent use of *agapē* ("love") and *theos* ("God") as both the keywords and link words. The unit 1:5–2:2 consists of three grouped subunits which prominently have *hamartia* / *hamartanō* ("sin") as either the keyword or link word.

As one builds such units in 1 John, one becomes aware of dominant words (often the keywords or link words of the subunits) which run a train of thought throughout the unit. For example, while some form of *phaneroō* is a common key word and link word in 2:28–3:10, it is not used as such in all subunits (i.e. not in 3:9–10). Nevertheless some similar form of the word does appear in every subunit (the adjective *phaneros* occurs in 3:9–10) and so some form of *phaner-* becomes a key word for the entire unit.

Indeed this threading of some form of *phaner-* throughout illustrates the advantage of such analysis for understanding the development of meaning. In every subunit in 2:28–3:10 the word is highlighted in some way (inclusion in 2:28–3:2; centre sentence in chiasmic-like structure of 3:3–6; appearing

outside parallel sentences in 3:7–8; middle sentence of five-fold structure of 3: 9–10). Noting this, one can understand the importance of “appearance” or “revelation” in this passage. In Christ’s appearing we may have confidence and not be ashamed, as, when we are God’s children, we are like him. Our being like him means that we are righteous and so the world doesn’t know us because it didn’t know him. There is sinning and unrighteousness, yet Christ appeared to take away sins and to undo the work of the devil. Thus one is born of God, and not of the devil, and through the appearing Christ, the children are like him in his appearance – it is then apparent they act righteously (i.e. in love).

It is apparent that this process of gathering together subunits is usually not an automatic process. In some situations it involves some thought as to how the keywords and link words relate to the flow of meaning, and thus some interpretation (and hence debate) may be involved in the process. Generally it is clear to see changes in the patterns of keywords and link words.

The suggested results of such an analysis of 1 John are given in Table 2. It can be seen from this analysis that the way that subunits are linked together is an indication of how the author’s thoughts may develop. While almost all subunits in 1 John are linked together via a link word or idea, some links are

stronger than others. A verse containing a weak link corresponds to what Brown describes as “hinge verses.”²⁵

TABLE TWO

PROPOSED UNITS OF 1 JOHN

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|--|
| 1) | 1:1–4(5) ²⁶ | Witness and Proclamation of the Word of Life
– what “we” have seen and heard is passed on “to you” |
| 2) | 1:5(6)–2: 2 | Sin, Truth and the Work of the Son |
| 3) | 2:3–2:11 | The Word of Truth and Light from the Beginning
- walking in the way of the commandment of love |
| 4) | 2:12–2:17 | The Reasons for Writing
- the word, origins and loving the world |
| 5) | 2:18–2:27 | The Deception from the Truth
- knowing the Father/Son, the word from the beginning
abiding, the falsehood of the antichrists |
| 6) | 2:28–3:10 | Sin and Origins (Children of God)
- the revealing of Christ to take away sin and for us as
God's children to be righteous like him |
| 7) | 3:11–3:18 | Message of Love from the Beginning, Loving Brother/Sister |
| 8) | 3:19–3:24 | Knowing We Are Children of Truth, Keeping the Command,
Believing |

²⁵ Brown, *Epistles* 119.

²⁶ Verse 5 has been labelled by some commentators as a “hinge” or “transition” verse (See, for example Brown, *Epistles* 119, 225; Strecker, *Letters* 23), in that it has characteristics of both the first and the second unit. It “hinges” from the Prologue into the remainder of the Epistle. Such “hinge” behaviour is not uncommon in the Johannine literature. It also occurs, for example, at 5:13 and John 2:11.

- 9) 4:1–4:6 Origins From God or of the World, Truth or Deception
 - 10) 4:7–4:12 Knowing God and Love
 - 11) 4:13–4:21 The Command to Love Because of God's Love
 - 12) 5:1–5:5 Qualities of Being a Child of God
 – The One Born of God Believes, Loves and Conquers
 - 13) 5:6–5:12(13) The True Witness of the Son and Believing
 - 14) 5:13(14)–5:21 Knowing the Truth and Life
-

The structure is not “tight”. For example, not every subunit in a unit has the same keyword, or is linked by the same link word or idea. This lack of a neat structure demonstrates at a more microscopic level one reason why it has proved difficult to find an agreed structure for 1 John.

For reasons which must be left for another paper, the above units can further grouped to suggest the overall structure as shown in Table 3.

TABLE THREE

PROPOSED STRUCTURE FOR JOHN 1

Prologue:	1:1–4(5)	- Witness and Proclamation of The Word of Life
Section 1	1:5–2:27	- The Word of Truth
	1:5–2:2	– Sin, Truth and the Work of the Son
	2:3–2:11	– The Word of Truth and Light from the Beginning
	2:12–2:17	– Reasons for Writing, the Word, Origins and Loving the World

	2:18–2:27	– The Deception from the Truth
Section 2	2:28–5:5	- Knowing Love and Divine Origins
	2:28–3:10	– Sin and Origins (Children of God)
	3:11–3:18	– Message of Love from the Beginning, Loving Brother/Sister
	3:19–3:24	– Knowing We Are Children of Truth, Keeping the Commands and Believing
	4:1–4:6	– Origins from God or the World, Truth or Deception
	4:7–4:12	– Knowing God and Love
	4:13–4:21	– The Command to Love Because of God’s Love
	5:1–5	– The One Born of God Believes, Loves and Conquers
Conclusion	5:6–5:21	- Believing in the Son for Eternal Life
	5:6–5:12	– The True Witness of the Son and Believing
	5:13(14)–5:21	– Knowing the Truth and Life

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate the presence of subunits in 1 John which are based on rhetorical structures, particularly repetitions. Link words allow the subunits to be grouped together as a natural way of expressing the flow of thought through 1 John. Such linking permits a natural grouping of subunits into larger units which provide an overall view of 1 John.

Some of the proposed divisions between units as detailed in Table 2 are common to those proposed by some scholars, while other divisions are in agreement with other scholars, thus confirming to some extent the process followed above. Differences between proposed schema in the literature do often appear in the section 2: 28 – 5: 5 and thus my proposal also deviates from many scholars’. Such divergence illustrates the difficulties involved.

Determining structure is helpful in following the line of argument in the text, something which has proved to be notoriously difficult in 1 John. This paper proposes a method based on the rhetoric of the author. Having observed the use of repetition, a structure can be determined, and, by following the linkages between the subunits, a macrostructure can be established. The presence of subunits demonstrates the author's grouping of ideas in small segments which link together to form a unit in which the ideas are developed. An example of this was given for 2:28–3:10. Attention to this structure allows the reader/listener to come to a greater understanding of otherwise seemingly incoherent passages. Such structuring proves to indicate how ideas are connected, repeated and developed in 1 John, as well as providing a basis for allusion to the Gospel of John. Details of this will need to wait for further work to be published.

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