

# 1 John 5:20 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

**1 John 5:20** And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him Who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life:

**Greek** - oidamen (1PRAI) de hoti o huios tou theou ekei (3SPAI) kai dedoken (3SRAI) hemin dianoian hina ginoskomen (1PPAS) ton alethinon kai esmen (1PPPAI) en to alethino en to huio autou lesou Christo houtos estin (3SPAI) o alethinos theos kai zoe aionios:

**Amplified** - And we [have seen and] know [positively] that the Son of God has [actually] come to this world and has given us understanding and insight [progressively] to perceive (recognize) and come to know better

and more clearly Him Who is true; and we are in Him Who is true—in His Son Jesus Christ (the Messiah). This [Man] is the true God and Life eternal.

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

**NLT** And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God. And now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.

**Wuest** - We know with an absolute knowledge that the Son of God has come and is here, and that He has given us a permanent understanding in order that we may be knowing in an experiential way the One who is genuine. And we are in the Genuine One, in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the genuine God and life eternal.

- **we know:** 1Jn 5:1 4:2,14)(and: Mt 13:11 Lu 21:15 24:45 Joh 17:3,14,25 1Co 1:30 2 Co 4:6 Eph 1:17-19 3:18 Col 2:2,3
- **Him Who:** Joh 14:6 17:3 Rev 3:7,14 6:10 15:3 19:11
- **and we:** 1Jn 2:6,24 4:16 Joh 10:30 14:20,23 15:4 17:20-23 2Co 5:17 Php 3:9
- **This is:** 1Jn 5:11-13 1:1-3 Isa 9:6 44:6 45:14,15,21-25 54:5 Jer 10:10 23:6 John 1:1-3 14:9 20:28 Ac 20:28 Ro 9:5 1Ti 3:16 Titus 2:13 Heb 1:8
- [1 John 5 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### THE THIRD CERTITUDE: WE KNOW CHRIST HAS COME

**Hiebert** explains that "This third assurance, the longest and most involved, is the ground and substance of the preceding two (1Jn 5:18-**note**, 1Jn 5:19-**note**). John again asserts the Christian certainty that the Son of God has come (1Jn 5:20a), indicates the resultant gift of understanding (1Jn 5:20b), and expresses the resultant experiential realization of believers (1Jn 5:20c)." ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

Vine adds that 1Jn 5:20 "states the ground upon which believers are assured of the facts mentioned in 1Jn 5:18**note** and 1Jn 5:19-**note**, as to their relationship with God and their consequent condition regarding sin, Satan and the world. In stressing again, and finally, the divine relationship imparted to believers, the apostle recalls the truths of the preexistence of the Son of God and His incarnation. The **perfect tenses** indicate the permanent results of what is stated."

**And (de)** "is literally a mild adversative particle, contrasting the blind indifference of the world (1Jn 5:19) with the new understanding of the believer." (Cole)

**We know** ([1492](#))(**eido/oida**) means we know absolutely, beyond a shadow of a doubt and that intuitive knowledge which is divinely derived is our permanent possession (as indicated by the **perfect tense**)!

**The Son of God has come** - The Name **Son of God** speaks of the deity of Jesus and the verb **has come** speaks of the historical event of His incarnation. He has "invaded" the world so to speak, not to destroy it but to save it (Jn 3:16).

**Cole** comments on **Son of God** - Jesus came and John and his fellow apostles had to recognize Him as the Son of God. That was a title of deity. For example, Jesus said (Luke 10:21-22), "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Jesus there claims a unique relationship with the Father that all others lack. Only He can reveal the Father to us, according to His sovereign will. If Jesus doesn't reveal the Father, we cannot know Him. In John 5:17-18, Jesus claimed that God is His Father, which the Jews understood as blasphemy, because he was making Himself equal with God. Rather than denying their charges, Jesus went on to state some of the strongest affirmations of His deity in all of Scripture. He claimed to have the power to give life to whom He wishes, to judge everyone, and to receive the same honor as the Father (John 5:21-23). He claimed that the day is coming when those in the tombs would hear His voice and come forth, either to a resurrection of life or of judgment (John 5:28-29). John and his fellow apostles recognized Jesus as the Son of God, because He had opened their eyes. This points to the historical foundation of the Christian faith. ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#))

**David Smith** - "The assurance and guarantee of it all—the incarnation, an overwhelming demonstration of God's interest in us and His concern for our highest good. Not simply a historic fact but an abiding operation—not 'came' (ēlthe) but '**hath come and hath given us.**' Our faith is not a matter of intellectual theory but of personal and growing acquaintance with God through the enlightenment of Christ's Spirit (ton alethinon), "the real" as opposed to the false God of the heretics."

**Has come (hēkō)** means to have come, have arrived, be present. **Wuest** says "John does not use *erchomai* (to come) here, a verb which speaks only of the act of coming, but **hēkō** which includes in the idea of coming, the fact of arrival and personal presence. It is, "the Son of God has come (in incarnation), has arrived and is here." While He departed in His glorified body to Heaven, yet He is here in His presence in the Church. His coming was not like that of a meteor, flashing across the sky and then gone. He remains in His followers on earth." ([Word Studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**Hiebert** has a helpful note on this verb (**heko**) - The verb (*hēkei*, a **present tense** verb with the force of the perfect) expresses the finality of His appearing in incarnation. In contemporary Greek pagan usage this verb was used to record the solemn appearance of a god, and indeed John 1:14 (**note**) portrays the solemn uniqueness of the incarnate Christ. The abiding reality of His incarnate appearing here on earth is essential for His present heavenly ministry (Heb. 2:17-18-**note**; Heb 4:14-16-**note**). ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

## WE KNOW CHRIST HAS GIVEN US UNDERSTANDING

**Has given (1325)(didomi)** means to give and in context is based on decision of will of Giver and no merit of the recipients. **Has given** is in the **perfect tense**, which could be paraphrased "has given with the result that the gift is in the permanent possession of the recipient." The **perfect tense** marks the abiding nature of this gift of **understanding**.

**Cole** - This divine gift of understanding brings us into a personal relationship with the only true God, so that we come to know Him. Here John uses a different word for know, which means, to know experientially. There is a great difference between knowing about someone and actually knowing the person himself. Through the understanding that Christ gives, we come personally to "know Him who is true." The word "true" means "genuine" or "authentic." He is the only genuine God; all others are fakes or impostors. ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#))

**Understanding (1271)(dianoia** from **dianoéomai** = to agitate in mind in turn from **dia** = through + **noeo** = to think, **nous** = mind) is literally "a *through mind* (which) denotes the ability to pass beyond the external and superficial to discern and understand true reality. *Dianoia* (John's only use of this word) signifies a process of the mind leading to a conclusion, hence denoting the faculty of forming a conclusion from certain facts. In context what is involved is the mental ability to discern the significance of the coming of Christ (Messiah as prophesied over in the OT), specifically the incarnation of the Son of God. This enlightenment also enables John and all true believers in Christ to see through and refute the heretical claims of the false teachers. It is the work of the Holy Spirit as God's "anointing" (1Jn 2:27-**note**) that gives the believer this understanding." ([Hiebert](#))

**Vine** - The word *dianoia*, "mind," is not merely, like *nous*, the seat of the faculty of perception, it is the thinking faculty of reflection itself, a disposition (not a function, but a product), which may be good, e.g., He 8:10-note and He 10:16-note, or evil, as here (Col 1:21-**note**) and in Luke 1:51, "imagination."

**So that (hina)** is a **term of purpose** which should always cause us to pause and ponder what is the purpose? As the **NET Note** says here **hina** "gives the purpose of the preceding affirmation: "we know that the Son of God has come and has given us insight (**so that we may** know Him who is true." ([NET Note](#)) In other words the chief objective of the gift of **understanding** is to lead us into a growing (**present tense**) personal (experiential) knowledge of God.

## EXPERIENTIAL KNOWING

**We may know (1097)(ginosko)** refers to knowledge gained by experience, a knowing intimately and not just intellectually. **Ginosko** is in the **present tense** which signifies that we continually know or we have the constant experience of knowing. Vincent says the idea is that we might "Apprehend progressively."

**Vine** explains that **know** is **ginosko** "which stresses the appropriation of knowledge rather than the possession of it (**eido/oida**); the **present tense**, too, conveys the thought of a continuous process of getting to know God. The same construction and thought are expressed in Christ's prayer in John 17:3 (see below). This power and process of the knowledge of God through the understanding given to us, is set in contrast to the darkness of the world (1Jn 5:19-**note**; cp. Eph. 4:18-**note**), and in contrast to the claims of the Gnostics, who regarded the Christian faith as merely an effort to communicate with the infinite. The believer is not groping in the dark."

**Jackman** points out, "**Understanding** Christian truth is not a matter of mastering doctrinal formulations, important though they are, or of grasping philosophical ideas like those the Gnostics propagated; but of meeting, knowing and submitting to the person who is truth, 'so that we may know Him Who is true.'" ([The Message of John's Letters](#))

Compare Jesus prayer request to His Father "And this is eternal life, that **they may know** (**ginosko** in the **present tense** = that we may know the Father personally and continue growing in that knowledge) Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

**Robertson on Him Who is true** - "That is, God." **Hiebert** adds "It designates Him as the God Who is genuine or real as opposed to the counterfeit gods of the heretics."

**This is the true God** ("the true or real one") - To Whom does **this** (houtos) refer? This could refer to either God the Father or Jesus (see explanation of **NET Note** below). **Vincent** favors "God the Father. Many, however, refer it to the Son." **Robertson** adds "Grammatically houtos (this) may refer to Jesus Christ or to 'the True One.'" It is a bit tautological to refer it to God, but that is probably correct, God in Christ, at any rate. God is eternal life (John 5:26) and He gives it to us through Christ."

The **NET Note** favors **this** (one) as referring to Jesus Christ - The pronoun This one (ο τοῦς, houtos) refers to a person, but it is far from clear whether it should be understood as a reference (1) to God the Father or (2) to Jesus Christ. R. E. Brown (Epistles of John [AB], 625) comments, "I John, which began with an example of stunning grammatical obscurity in the prologue, continues to the end to offer us examples of unclear grammar." The nearest previous antecedent is Jesus Christ, immediately preceding, but on some occasions when this has been true the pronoun still refers to God (see 1 John 2:3). The first predicate which follows This one in 5:20, the true God, is a description of God the Father used by Jesus in John 17:3, and was used in the preceding clause of the present verse to refer to God the Father (him who is true). Yet the second predicate of This one in 5:20, eternal life, appears to refer to Jesus, because although the Father possesses "life" (John 5:26, 6:57) just as Jesus does (John 1:4, 6:57, 1 John 5:11), "life" is never predicated of the Father elsewhere, while it is predicated of Jesus in John 11:25 and 14:6 (a self-predication by Jesus). If This one in 5:20 is understood as referring to Jesus, it forms an inclusion with the prologue, which introduced the reader to "the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." Thus it appears best to understand the pronoun This one in 5:20 as a reference to Jesus Christ. The Christological affirmation which results is striking, but certainly not beyond the capabilities of the author (see John 1:1 and 20:28): This One [Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal life. (**NET Note**)

**True** (**228**) (**alethinós** from **alethes** = true, one who cannot lie) is an adjective which pertains to being in accordance with historical fact - genuine, real, true, valid, trustworthy (worthy of confidence, dependable). **Alethinós** describes that which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the name -- thus genuine not spurious, fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended.

**Vine** explains that John means **true** as opposed to what is spurious and unreal, not true as opposed to what is false (which would be expressed by **alethes**). Again, God is not only the source of truth, He is the one and only genuine God."

**Wuest** on **true** - "**True**" is not **alethes**, "true," that is, veracious, but **alethinós** "genuine" as opposed to the false and counterfeit, here, the genuine God as opposed to the false God of the heretics. (**Word Studies from the Greek New Testament**)

**Drummond** on knowing God - "God very strangely condescends indeed in making things plain to me, actually assuming for the time the form of a man, that I at my poor level may better see Him. This is my opportunity to know Him. This incarnation is God making Himself accessible to human thought—God opening to man the possibility of correspondence through Jesus Christ. And this correspondence and this environment are those I seek. He Himself assures me, 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Do I not now discern the deeper meaning in Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent? Do I not better understand with what vision and rapture the profoundest of the disciples exclaims, 'The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we might know Him that is true?' " ("Natural Law in the Spiritual World").

If you have never read it, there is a modern day classic on knowing God written by J I Packer entitled **Knowing God**".

**We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ**- The Twentieth Century New Testament helps us understand the pronouns in this passage (but there is some disagreement) "and we are in union with the True God by our union with his Son, Jesus Christ." John is reminding us of our union with God. **Hiebert** adds that John "reaffirms that mystical union with God that John has repeatedly asserted (1Jn 2:5-note, 1Jn 2:24-note, 1Jn 2:27-28-note; 1Jn 3:24-note; 1Jn 4:4-note, 1Jn 4:12-13-note, 1Jn 4:15-16-note). The relationship expressed by "**in Him**" brings us back to the fellowship with God with which John begins the epistle (1Jn 1:3-note). Grayston adds that "The deepest level of awareness of God, is achieved only by intimate communion with the Son." (**New Century Bible Commentary**)

**Vine** adds that "The increasing knowledge of Him that is true is possible because we are in Him. The relationship involves the knowledge... being in the Father, we are in the Son, and, vice versa, being in the Son, we are in the Father. Both facts are intimate; the one involves the other; for what is stressed in the whole statement is the essential unity of the Father and Son (cp. John 10:30; 14:9, 10). What is predicated of the Father is here likewise predicated of the Son. Thus the essential deity of Christ is declared."

**This is the true God and eternal life** - "He is both "the true God, and eternal life." The second designation, used without the article,

is closely joined to the first designation; He is both true deity and life eternal. In Him Godhood and eternal life are inseparably united. This fact distinguishes Him from all false gods.

**Vine** sums this up by noting that "God is not an abstract conception, existing in the minds of people who hold certain doctrines, He is a personal reality, revealed in and through the Son, and experienced personally by believers."

**Hiebert** says "**This**" may refer either to "**him that is true**" (the Father) or to Jesus Christ. Both views have their ardent advocates... We accept a reference to **Jesus Christ** here as the true capstone of the epistle. Calling this "the clinching statement" of the epistle, Lenski asserts: "Everything depends on his deity, and his deity means no less than this, that as the Father who is made known to us by him is the only real God (1Th 1:9), so also his Son Jesus Christ "is the real God" and eternal life. If the Son is less, if he is not the real God even as the Father is the real God, then this entire epistle and all that it declares about his blood, expiation, our fellowship with God, etc., are futile."" ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

**Cole** concurs with Hiebert noting that "Conservative scholars are divided over whether the last phrase, "**This is the true God**," refers to the Father or to Jesus. John Stott and James Boice follow B. F. Westcott in arguing that "**This**" refers to "Him who is true," in which case all three uses of **true** refer to the Father. But, many early church fathers, as well as the Reformers, argued that the phrase refers to the closest antecedent, namely, to Jesus Christ. If so, this is one of the strongest direct statements of the deity of Christ in the New Testament. In light of John's polemic against the false teachers, who denied Jesus' deity, it would seem fitting at the end of the book to refer to Jesus as "**the only true God and eternal life**." ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#))

**Vine on eternal life** - Literally., "life eternal," with stress on each word. The experience just referred to, in the preceding note, is summed up in this. Christ is embodiment, as well as the source, of the life which springs from God and is given to believers, and will forever be ministered to them. To have the life is to have the person in eternal possession (1Jn 5:12-note). The apostle has stated that "God is light" (1Jn 1:5-note) and that "God is love" (1Jn 4:8-note, 1Jn 4:16-note); he now says, in effect, that "**God is life**." At the same time he recalls his opening phrase "concerning the Word of life" (1Jn 1:1-note), which forms his great subject.

**J. C. Philpot. Daily Words for Zion's Wayfarers.** October 25. "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." 1John 5:20

When the Lord Jesus is pleased in some solemn hour to reveal himself to our soul, when he graciously condescends to take the veil from off our heart that we may behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, when he kindly favors us with some manifestation and discovery of himself as the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person, then we know that the Son of God has come.

How do you know that the sun rose this morning? By the light which rose with it. So we may say, spiritually, "How do you know that the Son of God has come?" By the Sun of righteousness arising upon you with healing in his wings and the shining light which he diffuses in your heart. So the Lord speaks to Zion--"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." That is the way in which the darkness is dispersed; for he adds, "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall rise upon you, and his glory shall be seen upon you." Did not our blessed Lord say, "I am come a light into the world, that whoever believes on me should not abide in darkness?" And has he not promised, "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life?" Now as God is light, when he is pleased to shine into the soul, we walk in the light as he is in the light, and then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. This is the best, this is the surest, this is the safest way to know that the Son of God is come.

We know also that the Son of God is come by his presence; by his power put forth on our behalf; by the answers which he gives to prayer; by the way in which he appears in dark and gloomy hours, making crooked things straight and rough places plain, discovering himself to us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, showing unto us that in him there is rest and peace, solid, abiding happiness, and in no other. He thus draws and fixes our eyes upon himself, where he sits at the right hand of the Father in the fullness of his grace, glory, and majesty. Thus we know that the Son of God has come. Every prayer, every petition, every sigh and cry, every longing look that you cast up to him, and every word of his grace, every sweet promise, every glimpse or glance of the King in his beauty, which you receive out of his fullness, are all so many testimonies that the Son of God has come, and that you know that he has come. - J. C. Philpot. Daily Words for Zion's Wayfarers