

Did John Write 1 John 5:7-8?

An Analysis of the Johannine Comma

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Introduction

The Johannine Comma, or 1 John 5:7-8 as it is more commonly recognized, is the subject of intense debate and scrutiny. Some defend the Comma's inclusion in the text of 1 John, using a variety of arguments as to why it represents the original words that the Holy Ghost inspired John to write. Others rally together against the inclusion of the Comma, purporting that it is merely a 15th-century glossal addition, and not reflective of the original text. Who is right? Was the Johannine Comma artificially added by overzealous Trinitarians despite not being original, or did Arian heretics remove it throughout the centuries?

The Authorized King James Version reads 1 John 5:7-8 as “⁷ For there are three that bear record **in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.** ⁸ **And there are three that bear witness in earth,** the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” The bolded text is the text in question. For instance, the Legacy Standard Bible reads 1 John 5:7-8 as “⁷ For there are three that bear witness: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.” In the footnotes, there is a note for verse 8 that says “A few late mss [manuscripts] add... *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and*

these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth, the Spirit” (italics original).¹

There is a clear disagreement between the King James Version, which includes the Comma (as does the New King James Version, although it too includes a footnote questioning the Comma’s originality), and many of the versions of the scriptures translated in the 20th and 21st centuries. The basis for this difference, as revealed in the footnote of the Legacy Standard Bible, is textual in nature. These translations of the Bible are translated from different Greek texts, which either include or don’t include the Comma. For instance, the United Bible Society’s 4th edition of the Greek New Testament has included this footnote: “A few very late MSS add the words that could be translated as ‘in heaven – the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three witnesses on earth’”.² Meanwhile, Dr. Henry Morris, an advocate of the King James Version, known for his staunch defense of Young Earth Creationism, says this about the Comma in the notes of his *Henry Morris Study Bible*, “On the other hand, since it does fit perfectly in the context, it also seems that this verse could well have been in John’s original autograph, and then been removed from most of the **accessible manuscripts** at the height of the Arian controversy in the fourth century” (bold added).³ He then

¹ *Legacy Standard Bible*, note on 1 John 5:7 (Three Sixteen Publishing, 2021).

² J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, note on 1 John 5:7 (Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 840.

³ Henry M. Morris, *The KJV Henry Morris Study Bible* (Master Books, 2012), 1969.

goes on to offer several points of defense for the Comma, concluding with the statement “It should still be regarded as part of the true text.” We see, therefore, that with such a firm division of disagreement, an honest examination must be made of all the available evidence to come to a conclusion.

In this study, we will first examine the manuscript tradition and trace the record of the Johannine Comma throughout church history. Then we will investigate the claims of the grammatical and thematic necessity of the Comma for the language of the text. Finally, we will examine the historical evidence for the Comma, analyzing quotations from the patristics and early Christians, as well as the heresies prevalent at that time that may have led to alterations in the text.

The advocate for the King James Version should seek to determine whether there is a defense for the Johannine Comma through the evidence alone, not merely blind faith in the text of the Authorized Version. While this may be sufficient for one’s own faith, it will likely fail in a discussion to persuade others. The advocate for modern translations of the scriptures should commit to examining all the evidence presented and not stop short of finality. Many who advocate for the removal of the Comma have never studied the issue past the 15th century.

The Manuscript Tradition

A Brief History of Textual Transmission

God has performed a fantastic miracle of preservation by providing the means of our holding a copy of His perfect word in our hands. As 21st-century humans, we often have a misconstrued view of what perfection means. Before the invention of the photocopier in 1938, the idea that a flawless copy of a preexisting text could be made didn't exist. Even with the invention of the printing press in 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg, there could still be errors and flaws in the copying of texts (search for the "He Bible" or the "Wicked Bible" as examples). For most of human history, the transmission of written works consisted of hand-copying those works and distributing them. There were trained scribes, whose occupation was to perform this tedious duty of copying, but they were expensive to hire, and even they made simple mistakes.

The preservation of God's word, therefore, did not appear in the form of a single copy of the scriptures passed down from generation to generation, but rather through an abundance of manuscripts and copies (more than any other work of antiquity), in which the single copy of the scriptures could be extracted. It is this process of prayerfully seeking God's face to discern which readings are inspired Scripture and which are not that has led to the dilemma being discussed here.

The King James Version of the Bible was translated from 1604 to 1611 by 47 linguistic scholars and theologians. The basis for their version of the New Testament was translated from seven printed copies of the Greek New Testament, five editions of Desiderius Erasmus, one edition of Robert Estienne (Stephanus), and one edition of Theodore Beza. These seven Greek copies of the New Testament did not agree with one another completely, and the Johannine Comma was one of those disagreements.

The Comma in the Greek Text Underlying the King James Version

Erasmus did not include the Comma in his first two editions of the Greek New Testament (published 1516 and 1519). Still, he did in his final three (published 1522, 1527, and 1535), and both Stephanus (3rd edition published 1550) and Beza (final edition published 1598) included it in theirs. We see, therefore, that the Comma did not enter the text of the King James Version's New Testament due to the opinion of a single man. The 47 translators of the KJV each had the opportunity to study the issue, and all three textual contributors – Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza – included it in at least some of their editions of the Greek New Testament.

This fact stands in staunch opposition to the argument that Erasmus was coerced into adding the

Comma into his third edition due to its stark proclamation of the Trinity. Codex Montfortianus (GA61), dated to 1520, was rumored to have been back-translated from the Latin Vulgate to provide a reading of the Johannine Comma in a Greek manuscript.⁴ Even if this is true (and there are arguments stating that it was actually copied by Franciscan monks for their own use), it does not answer why Stephanus and Beza both included it in their edition, as there is no indication of their being threatened similarly. In addition, this story does not eliminate the witness of the Comma in manuscripts dating before Erasmus began his work.

The Comma within Greek Manuscripts

When examining the Greek manuscripts containing the Johannine Comma, we find two categories: manuscripts in which the Comma is contained within the text, and manuscripts in which the Comma is written in the margin as a scribal gloss.⁵

Instances within the Text

GA 918 is a manuscript copied in Spain by Nicolas de la Torre between the years 1573 and 1578. Some sources claim that Torre added the Comma into his

⁴ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 146.

⁵ Elijah Hixson, "The Greek Manuscripts of the Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7–8)," *Evangelical Textual Criticism* (blog), January 7, 2020, <https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2020/01/the-greek-manuscripts-of-comma.html>.

copy of the Greek New Testament from Erasmus' third edition, citing the similarity of Erasmus' wording with Torre's.⁶ The problem with this argument is that the Comma was not original to Erasmus. Erasmus sourced the Comma from GA 61 at a minimum, not to mention that, as a Catholic priest, Erasmus was more than familiar with the fact that the Latin Vulgate contained the Comma. Again, whether Torre sourced the Comma from Erasmus is the wrong question. The real question is, once again, where did the Comma come from initially so that Erasmus could add it into his 3rd edition.

GA 626 (Codex Ottobonianus 298) is the earliest Greek manuscript of 1 John discovered so far that contains the Johannine Comma, dated to the 1360s.⁷ The existence of this manuscript should be a strong witness for the inclusion of the Comma; however, there is some debate as to whether or not the Comma was brought into the Greek text from the Latin, because this text is a Latin-Greek diglot (multi-language parallel).

In addition to GA 61 (Codex Montfortianus), two other Greek manuscripts contain the Johannine Comma: GA 2473 and GA 2318. However, they are dated to the 17th and 18th centuries, respectively, which is one to two hundred years after the publication of the King James Bible.

Instances in the Margin

⁶ J. K. Elliott, *A Survey of Manuscripts Used in the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

⁷ Elliott, *A Survey of Manuscripts*.

Six Greek copies of 1 John include the Johannine Comma as a scribal gloss in the margin. Each gloss is clearly written in a different hand than the original copyist, and many of the glosses are clearly dated to the 16th century.⁸

GA 429 (Codex Guelferbytanus), unlike GA 918, shows clear sourcing of the Comma from Erasmus' third edition, the first edition to include the Comma. Not only does it reportedly read similarly to Erasmus' rendition, it also includes a citation to Erasmus on the facing page.⁹

GA 177 also adds the Comma to the margin from a later source. The manuscript is apparently dated to the 11th century,¹⁰ making it a reasonably aged copy of John's first epistle, but the glossal Comma was added after the 1550s because it includes the verse number, something that wasn't added in any text of scripture until the 1551 edition of Stephanus' Greek New Testament. The gloss is further dated into the modern era by a note written at the end by Ignatius Hardt (verified by handwriting analysis) and dated June 20, 1785.¹¹

GA 221 has a similar history to that of GA 177. The base manuscript is dated to the 10th century, but the glossal Comma is dated to after 1854. In Henry Coxe's *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Bodleianae: Pars tertia (Catalogue of Manuscript*

⁸ Hixson, "Greek Manuscripts of the Comma."

⁹ Elliott, *A Survey of Manuscripts*.

¹⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 647.

¹¹ Ignatius Hardt, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum graecorum bibliothecae regiae Bavaricae* (J. B. Strobl, 1806), 2:cod. 32.

Codices of the Boleian Library: Part Three), GA 221 is listed as one of the manuscripts that **does not** contain the Johannine Comma.¹² Coxe's work was published in 1854, requiring the gloss to have been added afterward.

GA 88 (Codex Regis) is a 12th-century manuscript found in the possession of Pope Paul III.¹³ While the Comma itself isn't dated, there is a separate note added in the margin pointing out the chapter and verse number of the gloss, leading some to believe the Comma was added after the 1550s. This is built upon the presupposition that the same person who wrote the note also wrote the Comma, and this is unverifiable.

GA 636 is a 15th-century manuscript that is believed to have been sourced from an Augustinian Monastery in Naples, Italy.¹⁴ The glossal Comma does appear to have been written later, which, with a 15th-century dating, may have allowed for the copying of Erasmus' work. Still, the wording isn't identical with Erasmus', so the source of the Johannine Comma in this manuscript is uncertain. There is also an abundance of other glossal notes in this manuscript, indicating that many scribes may have contributed to its final form.

As a unique entry, Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest while still largely complete Greek manuscripts

¹² Henry Coxe, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Bodleianae: Pars tertia (Catalogue of Manuscript Codices of the Bodleian Library: Part Three)* (Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1854).

¹³ Brent Kinman, "Codex 88 as a Text-Critical Witness to the Johannine Corpus," *New Testament Studies* 50, no. 4 (2004): 583.

¹⁴ Theodore J. Weeden, Jr., "A Description of a Ninth-Century Greek Manuscript, GA 636," *Novum Testamentum* 11, no. 4 (1969): 287.

discovered (325-350 AD), contains an umlaut in the margins next to the line where the Johannine Comma would have been found, indicating a known textual variant, similar to how the LSB and UBS 4th ed. included a footnote. J. Edward Miller in his article “*Some Observations on the Text-Critical Function of the Umlauts in Vaticanus, with Special Attention to 1 Corinthians 14.13-35,*” says, “The Vaticanus scribe consistently places the umlaut next to the line supplying the beginning of a questionable reading, whether long or short (and whether the text is included in or omitted from Vaticanus).”¹⁵ This is robust evidence that in one of the earliest manuscripts we have of 1 John, there was a known textual variant at that location in the text, the only one of which that has been discovered thus far, being the Johannine Comma.

Summary of the Examination of Greek Manuscripts

After examining each of the Greek manuscripts containing the Johannine Comma, it is understandable why many people believe it not to be original. However, let us create some context. Out of the roughly 5,000 Greek manuscripts we have of the New Testament, only about 500 of them contain 1 John. Many of the manuscripts show signs of age and degradation, so of the nearly 500 Greek manuscripts containing 1 John, only 12 contain the portion of 1 John in which the Comma would appear. Of those 12, the oldest two are dated to the 4th

¹⁵ J. Edward Miller, "Some Observations on the Text-Critical Function of the Umlauts in Vaticanus, with Special Attention to 1 Corinthians 14.34-35," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 2 (2003): 217.

century, two to the 5th, one to the 6th, one to the 8th, four to the 9th, and two to the 10th century.¹⁶ While this can be interpreted subjectively, I hardly find this to be “overwhelming textual evidence,” primarily because I believe it is based on an interpretive fallacy.

Many modern textual critics will turn to the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament when asked to find the Bible. But to teach or imply that the Greek and Hebrew are superior to any translation is fallacious. Certainly, translations should be translated from the original languages, but the New Testament writers themselves used a translation as their copy of the scriptures. Many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament provide evidence that the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint (LXX), was used, rather than the original Hebrew text¹⁷. The Holy Spirit of God inspired such use. So, when determining whether the Johannine Comma is original, it would be foolish to rely solely on the Greek manuscripts when there is clear evidence of the Comma in the Latin manuscripts.

The Comma within Latin Manuscripts

The Comma’s existence in the Latin Vulgate is a point of argument for many modern textual critical

¹⁶ Berean Patriot, "The Johannine Comma of 1 John 5:7-8: Added or Removed?," Berean Patriot, March 8, 2018, <https://www.bereanpatriot.com/the-johannine-comma-of-1-john-57-8-added-or-removed/>.

¹⁷ John 12:41 quotes Isaiah 6:1 in the Greek Septuagint, not the Hebrew Masoretic text, mentioning “his glory,” rather than “his train”.

scholars. They will point to this fact as evidence that the Comma is not original. However, this argument presupposes that the original rendering of the scriptures can only be found in the Greek. If this is true, then I can have no confidence that I have the scriptures, but simply a whisper of the scriptures. This is the same persuasion that Muslims propose for their Quran, stating that the true Quran only exists in Arabic, and any translation is merely the meaning of the Quran.

The oldest reported Latin manuscript discovered dates back to the 6th century and is known as the Codex Fuldensis.¹⁸ Much could be made about the fact that this manuscript also omits the Johannine Comma, but it would also be less than truthful to call this manuscript a direct translation of the New Testament. The Gospels, for example, are not translated as four independent accounts of the life of Christ but instead are replaced with the translation of the Diatessaron, a 2nd-century harmony of the Gospels into a single account. Beyond the regular extractions that could be expected from a harmony of the Gospels, Tatian, the author, also added material at times that was not found in the original Gospel accounts.

Regarding other Latin manuscripts, it is stated by F.H.A. Scrivener in his *A Plain Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism*, who also compiled the Greek text underlying the Authorized Version, that “49 out of 50 [Vulgate] manuscripts testify to this disputed

¹⁸ Nicholas J. Zola, "Victor's Preface in Codex Fuldensis and the Search for an "Old Latin" Diatessaron," *Early Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2024): 347.

Comma.”¹⁹ The Latin Vulgate was first translated by Jerome, who was supportive of the Comma (we’ll examine his comments later), so it would be reasonable for the majority of the copies of his work to follow suit.

¹⁹ F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism*, 4th ed., rev. Edward Miller (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894).

Quotations from the Patristics and Early Christians

During the same time period that we find the earliest Latin and Greek manuscripts, we also see a culture that attests to the legitimacy of the Johannine Comma. Not only are there numerous quotations affirming the Comma, but many of them also speak as to why it is missing from most of our manuscripts today.

Jerome, in his prologue to the *Canonical Epistles*, states “Just as these are properly understood and so translated faithfully by interpreters into Latin without leaving ambiguity for the readers nor [allowing] the variety of genres to conflict, especially in that text where we read the unity of the trinity is placed in the first letter of John, where much error has occurred at the hands of unfaithful translators contrary to the truth of faith, who have kept just the three words water, blood and spirit in this edition omitting mention of Father, Word and Spirit in which especially the catholic [universal] faith is strengthened and the unity of substance of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is attested.”²⁰

Not only does Jerome state that the Comma attests the unity of substance in the Trinity, he also notes that the omission of the Comma in many manuscripts was due to “unfaithful translators contrary to the truth of

²⁰ Jerome, *Prologue to the Canonical Epistles*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. 2, vol. 6, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893).

the faith.” This is not the argument of a 21st-century podcaster, but rather one of the most respected of the patristics and a contemporary of Christological and Trinitarian heresies.

The most notable heretic at this time was a man named Arius, who rejected the Trinity and believed Jesus to be the first creation of the Father (similar to the doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses). He was so successful in spreading his heresy that the first Council of Nicaea was convened to condemn his teachings. With his heresies spread so widely, many believe that the Arians had a significant influence on the copying of manuscripts, especially in northern Africa and Egypt.

Cyprian of Carthage (200-258 AD) is the first recorded quotation of the Johannine Comma, which we find in Treatise I:6 of his work *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate* (On the Unity of the Catholic Church). He writes, “The Lord says, ‘I and the Father are one;’ and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, ‘And these three are one.’”²¹ Cyprian doesn’t merely allude to the Comma, like Tertullian and Origin. He clearly states “it is written” and then quotes the Johannine Comma.

Athanasius (296-373 AD) also quotes part of the Comma, stating “But also, is not that sin-remitting, life-

²¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *The Writings of Cyprian, Novatian, Lactantius, and the Works of Other Writers from the Time of Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1886).

giving and sanctifying washing [baptism], without which, no one shall see the kingdom of heaven, given to the faithful in the Thrice-Blessed Name? In addition to all these, John affirms, ‘and these three are one.’”²²

Augustine (354-430 AD) said this in his comments regarding 1 John 5:8, “Three things then we know to have issued from the Body of the Lord when He hung upon the tree: first, the spirit: of which it is written, ‘And He bowed the head and gave up the spirit:’ then, as His side was pierced by the spear, ‘blood and water.’ Which three things if we look at as they are in themselves, they are in substance several and distinct, and therefore they are not one. But if we will inquire into the things signified I by these, there not unreasonably comes into our thoughts the Trinity itself, which is the One, Only, True, Supreme God, Father and Son and Holy Ghost, of whom it could most truly be said, ‘**There are Three Witnesses, and the Three are One:**’” (bold added).²³ Augustine mentions not only that these three are one, but also that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, not specifically the spirit, water, and blood, are the Three Witnesses.

Eugenius of Carthage (401-505 AD) was a faithful defender of the doctrine of the Trinity against the

²² Athanasius, *On the Holy Spirit* 19, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. 2, vol. 4, *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1892).

²³ Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 120, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. 1, vol. 7, *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888).

Arian heresy in the year 484 AD. One of the texts he used to defend this doctrine was the Johannine Comma. "...and in order that we may teach until now, more clearly than light, that the Holy Spirit is now one divinity with the Father and the Son. It is proved by the evangelist John, for he says, 'there are three which bear testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.'" Eugenius clearly identifies the author as John, and quotes the Comma, even using the word "Word" to refer to the Son.²⁴

Many modern textual scholars will question why the Comma wasn't used to defend the Trinity during the convening of the many ecumenical councils, such as the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and the Council of Constantinople (381 AD). First, it should be noted that, as seen above, there were several other occasions when the Comma was quoted, both to defend the doctrine of the Trinity and for different reasons. Second, the reason there are no clear quotations of the Johannine Comma in the records of the councils could very well be the same reason many Christians don't quote it today. It may not have been included in their copy of 1 John, or they chose other texts to defend the doctrine, knowing that the Comma was disputed. For instance, I probably wouldn't utilize the Johannine Comma to defend the Trinity to a Jehovah's Witness because they would say that the Comma wasn't original. There are plenty of other texts that prove the doctrine of the Trinity, not to mention the

²⁴ Eugenius of Carthage, "Confession of Faith," in Victor Vitensis, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, trans. John Moorhead (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992).

fact that the New Testament as a whole assumes the Trinity is authentic. The New Testament authors didn't typically include arguments for the existence of the Trinity; they wrote as if everyone believed in the Trinity of God.

Grammatical and Thematic Consistency of 1 John 5:7-8

While I do not have a thorough enough understanding of the intricacies of Greek grammar, the argument has been made that the removal of the Johannine Comma breaks fundamental rules of Greek grammar. Dr. David Cloud says this about the topic. “Another consideration is **THE GRAMMATICAL ARGUMENT**. “The omission of the Johannine Comma leaves much to be desired grammatically. The words ‘Spirit,’ ‘water’ and ‘blood’ are all neuters, yet they are treated as masculine in verse 8. This is strange if the Johannine Comma is omitted, but it can be accounted for if it is retained; the masculine nouns ‘Father’ and ‘word’ in verse 7 regulate the gender in the succeeding verse due to the power of attraction principle. The argument that the ‘Spirit’ is personalized and therefore masculine is offset by verse 6 which is definitely referring to the personal Holy Spirit yet using the neuter gender. [I. H. Marshall is a current voice for this argument: ‘It is striking that although Spirit, water, and blood are all neuter nouns in Greek, they are introduced by a clause expressed in the masculine plural ... Here in 1 John he clearly regards the Spirit as personal, and this leads to the personification of the water and the blood’ *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1978), p. 237n.] Moreover, the words ‘that one’ (*to hen*) in verse 8 have no antecedent if verse 7 is omitted, [Marshall calls this construction ‘unparalleled,’ p. 237] whereas if verse 7 is retained, then the antecedent is

‘these three are one’ (*to hen*)” (Strouse, *A Critique of D.A. Carson’s The King James Version Debate*).” (bold and italics original).²⁵

I believe there is also a strong argument that the Comma fits thematically in this portion of 1 John. We already see the three persons of the Trinity mentioned in the surrounding verses. Verse 5 mentions the act of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Verses 6 and 9-13 each mention the Son, verses 9-11 mention the Father, and verses 6 and 8 mention the Spirit, although the reference in verse 8 has the word “spirit” in lowercase. The Comma doesn’t add the doctrine of the Trinity to 1 John 5; it merely connects the thought from verse 6 to the rest of the chapter.

Additionally, the choice of the word “Word” to refer to the Son seems to indicate authenticity. Any editor who sought to add the Comma to the text would have no reason to deviate from the names already being used to identify the Son in this passage, namely the Son (4 times), Jesus Christ (1 time), Christ (1 time), and Son of God (5 times). But the author of the Comma uses the word “logos,” or the “Word,” a name that only the apostle John uses elsewhere in John 1:1, 14, and Revelation 19:13.

Separately, as a cursory argument, the apostle John is known as one of the staunchest defenders of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. He

²⁵ David Cloud, "A Defense of 1 John," Way of Life, last modified January 24, 2023, <https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/a-defense-of-1-john.php>.

mentions the Spirit more than any of the other Gospel accounts (see John 14-16), and the Spirit is mentioned in 1 John four times (not including the Comma), in 3:24, 4:2, 13, and 5:6.” It would not be out of place for the Holy Spirit to inspire John to mention Him.

Cultural Considerations during the Time of Writing

As many scholars of the Bible might know, 1 John was not written in a vacuum. It was written towards the end of the first century, when the first heresies were beginning to grow. The first of these was Gnosticism, a family of heresies, all with slightly differing opinions, which holds that a special knowledge was needed to acquire salvation. They each had a skewed view of the persons of the Godhead, often demeaning the Son and Spirit to the level of mere creations. *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* notes that “Irenaeus reported that one of the reasons John wrote his Gospel was to refute the views of Cerinthus, an early gnostic. Over against the gnostic assertion that the true God would not enter our world, John stressed in his Gospel that Jesus was God’s incarnate Son.”²⁶

John’s first epistle was written at a time when Christological and Trinitarian heresies were blossoming, so it is highly plausible that the Holy Spirit inspired John

²⁶ Chad Brand and Eric Mitchell, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 649.

to write such a bold declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity as 1 John 5:7-8.

Endorsements from Faithful Men

Finally, after the presentation of all this evidence, it seems fitting to examine what faithful men of the past and present have concluded regarding the Johannine Comma. All of the men to be mentioned were either contemporaries of Erasmus and his editions of the Greek New Testament or lived afterward. Therefore, they each would have a large portion, if not all, of the evidence within their grasp to make an informed decision.

Matthew Henry, the beloved commentator from the 1800s, devoted a rather lengthy portion of his comments on 1 John 5:7 to its veracity, concluding that there are numerous reasons to believe it to be authentically original.

“We are stopped in our course by the contest there is about the genuineness of 1 John 5:7. It is alleged that many old Greek manuscripts have it not. We shall not here enter into the controversy. It should seem that the critics are not agreed what manuscripts have it and what not; nor do they sufficiently inform us of the integrity and value of the manuscripts they peruse. Some may be so faulty, as I have an old printed Greek Testament so full of *errata*, that one would think no critic would establish a various lection thereupon. But let the judicious collators of copies manage that business. There are

some rational surmises that seem to support the present text and reading. As,

(1.) If we admit 1 John 5:8; in the room of 1 John 5:7; it looks too like a tautology and repetition of what was included in 1 John 5:6; *This is he that came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and blood; and it is the Spirit that beareth witness. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.* This does not assign near so noble an introduction of these three witnesses as our present reading does.

(2.) It is observed that many copies read that distinctive clause, *upon the earth: There are three that bear record upon the earth.* Now this bears a visible opposition to some witness or witnesses elsewhere, and therefore we are told, by the adversaries of the text, that this clause must be supposed to be omitted in most books that want 1 John 5:7. But it should for the same reason be so in all. Take we 1 John 5:6; *This is he that came by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.* It would not now naturally and properly be added, *For there are three that bear record on earth,* unless we should suppose that the apostle would tell us that

all the witnesses are such as are on earth, when yet he would assure us that one is infallibly true, or even truth itself.

(3.) It is observed that there is a variety of reading even in the Greek text, as in 1 John 5:7. Some copies read *hen eisi*—are one; others (at least the *Complutensian*) *eis to hen eisin*—are to one, or agree in one; and in 1 John 5:8 (in that part that it is supposed should be admitted), instead of the common *en te ge*—in earth, the *Complutensian* reads *epi tes ges*—upon earth, which seems to show that that edition depended upon some Greek authority, and not merely, as some would have us believe, upon the authority either of the vulgar Latin or of *Thomas Aquinas*, though his testimony may be added thereto.

(4.) 1 John 5:7 is very agreeable to the style and the theology of our apostle; as, [1.] He delights in the title *the Father*, whether he indicates thereby God only, or a divine person distinguished from the Son. *I and the Father are one. And Yet I am not alone; because the Father is with me. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is*

not in him. Grace be with you, and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, 2 John 1:3. Then, [2.] The name the Word is known to be almost (if not quite) peculiar to this apostle. Had the text been devised by another, it had been more easy and obvious, from the form of baptism, and the common language of the church, to have used the name Son instead of that of the Word. As it is observed that Tertullian and Cyprian use that name, even when they refer to this verse; or it is made an objection against their referring to this verse, because they speak of the Son, not the Word; and yet Cyprian's expression seems to be very clear by the citation of Facundus himself. Quod Johannis apostoli testimonium beatus Cyprianus, Carthaginensis antistes et martyr, in epistolâ sive libro, quem de Trinitate scripsit, de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu sancto dictum intelligit; ait enim, Dicit Dominus, Ego et Pater unum sumus; et iterum de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu sancto scriptum est, Et hi tres unum sunt.—Blessed Cyprian, the Carthaginian bishop and martyr, in the epistle or book he wrote concerning the Trinity, considered the testimony of the apostle John as relating to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit; for

he says, the Lord says, I and the Father are one; and again, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit it is written, And these three are one. Now it is nowhere written that these are one, but in 1 John 5:7. It is probable than that St. Cyprian, either depending on his memory, or rather intending things more than words, persons more than names, or calling persons by their names more usual in the church (both in popular and polemic discourses), called the second by the name of the *Son* rather than of the *Word*. If any man can admit Facundus's fancy, that Cyprian meant that the Spirit, the water, and the blood, were indeed the Father, Word, and Spirit, that John said were one, he may enjoy his opinion to himself. For, *First*, He must suppose that Cyprian not only changed all the names, but the apostle's order too. For the blood (the Son), which Cyprian puts second, the apostle puts last. And, *Secondly*, He must suppose that Cyprian thought that by the blood which issued out of the side of the Son the apostle intended the Son himself, who might as well have been denoted by the water,—that by the water, which also issued from the side of the Son, the apostle intended the person of the Holy Ghost,—that by the Spirit, which in 1

John 5:6 is said to be truth, and in the gospel is called the Spirit of truth, the apostle meant the person of the Father, though he is nowhere else so called when joined with the Son and the Holy Ghost. We require good proof that the *Carthaginian* father could so understand the apostle. He who so understands him must believe too that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are said to be three witnesses on earth. *Thirdly*, *Facundus* acknowledges that Cyprian says that of his three it is written, *Et hi tres unum sunt—and these three are one*. Now these are the words, not of 1 John 5:8; but of 1 John 5:7. They are not used concerning the three on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; but the three in heaven, the Father, and the Word, and the Holy Ghost. So we are told that the author of the book *Deut. baptismo haereticorum*, allowed to be contemporary with Cyprian, cites John's words, agreeably to the Greek manuscripts and the ancient versions, thus: *Ait enim Johannes de Domino nostro in epistolâ nos docens, Hic es qui venit per aquam et sanguinem, Jesus Christus, non in aquâ tantùm, sed in aquâ et sanguine; et Spiritus est qui testimonium perhibet, quia Spiritus est*

veritas; quia tres testimonium perhibent, Spiritus et aqua et sanguis, et isti tres in unum sunt—For John, in his epistle, says concerning our Lord, *This is he, Jesus Christ, who came by water and blood, not in water only, but in water and blood; and it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth; for there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one.* If all the Greek manuscripts and ancient versions say concerning the Spirit, the water, and the blood, that *in unum sunt*—*they agree in one*, then it was not of them that Cyprian spoke, whatever variety there might be in the copies in his time, when he said it is written, *unum sunt*—*they are one*. And therefore Cyprian's words seem still to be a firm testimony to 1 John 5:7; and an intimation likewise that a forger of the text would have scarcely so exactly hit upon the apostolical name for the second witness in heaven, *the Word*. Them, [3.] As only this apostle records the history of the water and blood flowing out of the Saviour's side, so it is he only, or he principally, who registers to us the Saviour's promise and prediction of the Holy spirit's coming to glorify him, and to testify of him, and to convince the

world of its own unbelief and of his righteousness, as in his gospel, John 14:16, 17, 26, 15:26; 16:7-15. It is most suitable then to the diction and to the gospel of this apostle thus to mention the Holy Ghost as a witness for Jesus Christ. Then,

(5.) It was far more easy for a transcriber, by turning away his eye, or by the obscurity of the copy, it being obliterated or defaced on the top or bottom of a page, or worn away in such materials as the ancients had to write upon, to lose and omit the passage, than for an interpolator to devise and insert it. He must be very bold and impudent who could hope to escape detection and shame; and profane too, who durst venture to make an addition to a supposed sacred book. And,

(6.) It can scarcely be supposed that, when the apostle is representing the Christian's faith in overcoming the world, and the foundation it relies upon in adhering to Jesus Christ, and the various testimony that was attended him, especially when we consider that he meant to infer, as he does (1 John 5:9), *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this* (which he had rehearsed before) *is the witness of God*

which he hath testified of his Son. Now in the three witnesses on earth there is neither all the witness of God, nor indeed any witness who is truly and immediately God. The antitrinitarian opposers of the text will deny that either the Spirit, or the water, or the blood, is God himself; but, upon our present reading, here is a noble enumeration of the several witnesses and testimonies supporting the truth of the Lord Jesus and the divinity of his institution. Here is the most excellent abridgment or breviate of the motives to faith in Christ, of the credentials the Saviour brings with him, and of the evidences of our Christianity, that is to be found, I think, in the book of God, upon which single account, even waiving the doctrine of the divine Trinity, the text is worthy of all acceptance.

2. Having these rational grounds on our side, we proceed. The apostle, having told us that the Spirit that bears witness to Christ is truth, shows us that he is so, by assuring us that he is in heaven, and that there are others also who cannot but be true, or truth itself, concurring in testimony with him: *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these*

three are one, 1 John 5:7.” (bold and italics original).²⁷

Dr. Henry Morris, the founder of the Institute for Creation Research and author of countless books, including *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, says this about the Johannine Comma in *The Henry Morris Study Bible*.

“This verse is the famous ‘Johannine Comma,’ as it has been called, and it obviously carries the clearest and most explicit statement of the doctrine of the Trinity to be found in the Bible. However, it is found only in manuscripts of the Latin Bible and in four Greek manuscripts, so is believed by many biblical scholars to have been a pious addition or marginal annotation by some unknown copyist. The doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on this verse, of course, as it is implied in many other Scriptures (Ma 28:19, 2 Co 13:14). On the other hand, since it does fit perfectly in the context, it also seems that this verse could well have been in John’s original autograph, and then been removed from most of the accessible manuscripts at the height of the Arian controversy in the fourth century. To eliminate this verse

²⁷ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (World Publishing, 1986), 1090-92.

would leave 1 John 5:8 as a largely redundant repetition of 1 John 5:6, whereas the continuity and sense are beautifully structured and sequenced if it is included. It would seem much more likely for Origen or Arius to boldly remove the offending verse, both of whom rejected the doctrines of the Trinity and biblical inerrancy, than for some godly copyist to insert it. One who believed in the Trinity would surely have held the Scriptures in too much esteem to presume to amend them on his own initiative. The internal evidence strongly argues that the Johannine Comma was actually written by John in his epistle, as well as the testimony of the Latin manuscripts and such later authorities as Erasmus and the Reformers and many great commentators since, such as John Wesley and Matthew Henry. It should still be regarded as part of the true text.”²⁸

John Calvin, the famed 16th-century Reformer, from whom much of the Presbyterian faith is derived, seemed to try to play it safe with the Comma. He asserts that, in his opinion, it appears to be an accurate reading, but out of respect for those who disagreed, he later commented on verse 8 as if verse 7 wasn't present.

²⁸ Morris, *The KJV Henry Morris Study Bible*, 1969.

“There are three than bear record in heaven The whole of this verse has been by some omitted. Jerome thinks that this has happened through design rather than through mistake, and that indeed only on the part of the Latins. But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert any thing on the subject. Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause is added, and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies, I am inclined to receive it as the true reading. And the meaning would be, that God, in order to confirm most abundantly our faith in Christ, testifies in three ways that we ought to acquiesce in him. For as our faith acknowledges three persons in the one divine essence, so it is called in so really ways to Christ that it may rest on him.

When he says, *These three are one*, he refers not to essence, but on the contrary to consent; as though he had said that the Father and his eternal Word and Spirit harmoniously testify the same thing respecting Christ. Hence some copies have εἰς ἓν, “for one.” But though you read ἓν εἰσιν, as in other copies, yet there is no doubt but that the Father, the Word and the Spirit are said to be one, in the same sense in which afterwards the blood

and the water and the Spirit are said to agree in one.

But as the Spirit, who is one witness, is mentioned twice, it seems to be an unnecessary repetition. To this I reply, that since he testifies of Christ in various ways, a twofold testimony is fitly ascribed to him. For the Father, together with his eternal Wisdom and Spirit, declares Jesus to be the Christ as it were authoritatively, then, in this case, the sole majesty of the deity is to be considered by us. But as the Spirit, dwelling in our hearts, is an earnest, a pledge, and a seal, to confirm that decree, so he thus again speaks on earth by his grace.

But inasmuch as all do not receive this reading, I will therefore so expound what follows, as though the Apostle referred to the witnesses only on the earth.” (italics original).²⁹

John Wesley, the cofounder of the Methodist denomination, felt that the arguments given by Johan Bengel (Bengelius) in his *Gnomom Novi Testamenti* satisfactorily proved the validity of the Comma.

²⁹ John Calvin, "Calvin's Commentary on the Bible," *StudyLight.org*, accessed September 4, 2025, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/1-john-5.html>.

“What Bengelius has advanced, both concerning the transposition of these two verses, and the authority of the controverted verse, partly in his Gnomon, and partly in his Apparatus Criticus, will abundantly satisfy any impartial person. For there are three that testify - Literally, testifying, or bearing witness. The participle is put for the noun witnesses, to intimate that the act of testifying, and the effect of it, are continually present. Properly, persons only can testify; and that three are described testifying on earth, as if they were persons, is elegantly subservient to the three persons testifying in heaven. The Spirit - In the word, confirmed by miracles. The water - Of baptism, wherein we are dedicated to the Son, (with the Father and Spirit,) typifying his spotless purity, and the inward purifying of our nature. And the blood - Represented in the Lord's supper, and applied to the consciences of believer. And these three harmoniously agree in one - In bearing the same testimony, - that Jesus Christ is the divine, the complete, the only Saviour of the world.”³⁰

³⁰ John Wesley, "John 5 Commentary," *Bible Hub*, accessed September 4, 2025, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/wes/1_john/5.htm.

In addition to the number of faithful men who explicitly affirmed the Johannine Comma, countless others comment on the text with the belief that it is part of the inspired text of the scriptures. Faithful men of yesteryear, such as Dr. Oliver B. Greene, preacher of the Gospel Hour, wrote his commentary this way,³¹ as did Dr. Paul Chappell, the current pastor of Lancaster Baptist Church and the president of West Coast Baptist College.³² We see, therefore, that there is a strong argument from silence regarding the veracity of the Johannine Comma.

Confessions of Faith

As a final point in the examination of endorsements, we also find that the historic confessions of the Christian faith cite the Johannine Comma as the source for their statements regarding the Trinity. In the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646, 1 John 5:7, along with Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19, and 2 Corinthians 13:14, are cited regarding the following statement in chapter 2, section 3. “In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;

³¹ Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistles of John* (The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1966), 191-192.

³² Paul Chappell, *The Epistles of John: 1-3 John* (Striving Together Publications, 2025), 170-174.

the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”³³

The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 cites the Comma along with nine other scriptures in its statement. “In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar, relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him.”³⁴ This citation was maintained over 50 years later when the Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted this confession as the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith in 1742.³⁵

The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000, the current statement of faith for the Southern Baptist Convention, gives this confession regarding the Trinity. “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes,

³³ *The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Larger: Together With the Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976), 27.

³⁴ *The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689* (Banner of Truth, 2012), 34.

³⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith* (Revival Literature, 2007), 22.

but without division of nature, essence, or being.”³⁶ This confession is followed by three statements regarding the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, two of which (those addressing the Father and the Spirit) contain 1 John 5:7 as a citation. As a confession of faith written by an increasingly theologically liberal denomination 450 years after Erasmus published his third edition of the Greek New Testament containing the Comma, and 120 years since Wescott and Hort introduced a Comma-less reading to the masses, the fact that the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 continues to include the Comma as a citation for the Trinity speaks volumes as to the often hypocritical nature of modern day textual criticism.

³⁶ Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith & Message 2000," June 14, 2000, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>

Conclusion

After examining the manuscript evidence for the Johannine Comma among both the Greek and Latin traditions, the historical witness of early church Christians, the internal grammatical and thematic consistency, and the attestation of faithful men of God since Erasmus' time, I believe that there is sufficient evidence pointing to the genuineness and authenticity of the Comma. As a bold declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity, it stands as a faithful witness among the hordes of modern-day Arians who seek to dismantle this essential doctrine. With this evidence in mind, I do not believe that any believer should feel ashamed to use 1 John 5:7-8 to defend the Trinity, just as the historic confessions of faith did not.

On the other hand, I can understand why some individuals might continue to believe that the Comma is not original and therefore should not be included in the text of 1 John. An analysis of the Comma solely, or even predominantly, from the Greek manuscripts may lead someone to make such a conclusion. However, I believe that with the evidence presented here, those who disagree should take care not to be dogmatic. At the end of the day, there are over 300 years of tumult and doctrinal strife between the writing of John and the copying of the earliest copies that have been discovered thus far. None of us were there, so we are forced to rely on those who were, many of whom tell us that the Comma was a valuable defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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