

some were omitting the passage in his day. Of the few remnants of pre-Vulgate old Latin that have survived even opponents of inclusion acknowledge its presence in Codex Speculum (ca. 400), Codex Legionensis (ca. 650), and Codex Monacensis (ca. 650). Defenders of inclusion argue that this supports Jerome's claim that the passage existed well before the Vulgate was produced.

A final problem, if this text was not original is grammatical in nature. Unlike English, in ancient Greek many words had the grammatical genders of masculine, feminine, or neuter. In languages that assign gender to words, pronouns, adjectives, participles, definite articles, and sometimes even numbers must agree with nouns they modify in gender. Just as we would not say, "She is a good man," confusion of grammatical gender would have been considered, coarse, awkward, and improper to the ancient reader. In this passage the word translated **"three"** is the Greek word *treis* (τρεῖς), the masculine form of the word meaning "three." The problem is, if this passage was not in the original text as John wrote it the use of this masculine form creates an awkward gender confusion that is difficult to explain. Each of the words that follow it—*Spirit, water,* and *blood* are neuter in gender. So, we would not expect a masculine numeral to start this list, but instead the neuter form *tria* (τρία). If it was original, the words *Father* and *Word* are masculine, so we would expect such a list to start with a masculine form. Is this a clue that the text was omitted by some unscrupulous editor who forgot to eliminate this gender confusion? Some would argue, yes![4] If they are correct, then at some point very early in its history the *Johannine Comma* was omitted from many Greek manuscripts (whether by accident or deliberate alteration) and preserved for the most part only in Latin translation.

[4] A problem with this argument is the fact that if the comma was original we still must explain why both forms of the word **"three"** are masculine. Proponents argue that the inclusion of the neuter word *Spirit* following the two masculine words *Father* and *Word* would "masculinize" the word *Spirit.* Since the word *Spirit* starts the second list, it is argued that this "masculinization" would continue by attraction into the second list. While this may be the explanation Augustine around 390 A.D. while writing about 1 John 5:8 argued that *Spirit* symbolically referred to God the Father, *water* referred to the Holy Spirit, and *blood* referred to Jesus (*Against Maximinium*, 2. 22.3). While this was supposition on his part, if these three were intended to symbolize Deity in any way we would not be surprised to see a masculine term applied to these neuter words.

4700 Andrews Ave.
Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
www.olsenpark.com

ISSUE 17.44
November 8, 2015
BULLETIN OF THE OLSEN PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:
Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Jack Langley
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

The Johannine Comma

By Kyle Pope

One of the most problematic texts in the entire New Testament, from the standpoint of manuscript evidence is a passage found in the King James and New King James Versions, but omitted from virtually every other English translation since the American Standard Version of 1901. Marked in red in the chart below, the text is most of 1 John 5:7 and the first part of 5:8 (as numbered in the NKJV). This passage is usually referred to as *the Johannine* (jō-hanən) *Comma*. Why is this passage disputed, why do some translations delete it, and why is it present in some texts?

New King James Version	New American Standard Bible
6 This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear witness **in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.** 8 **And there are three that bear witness on earth:** the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.	6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. 7 And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8 For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

The Case Against Inclusion

The strongest argument against the inclusion of the *Johannine Comma* in the biblical text is the fact that the passage is absent from all known surviving Greek manuscripts prior to around 900 A.D.[1] There is also no undisputed quote of this passage by early church writers prior to around 370 A.D. when it is quoted by the Spanish bishop Priscillian in his *Liber Apologeticus* (I.4). Although the passage is present in approximately 95% of the estimated 10,000 Latin manuscripts that have survived, it is absent from the two oldest Vulgate manuscripts: Codex Fuldensis (ca. 541-46) and Codex Amiatinus (ca. 716). It is also absent from surviving manuscripts of ancient translations such as the Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopic. This has led the majority of modern scholars to argue that the passage was either brought into the text accidentally through a marginal comment being mistakenly included in the text, or as a deliberate addition during some period when the triune nature of God was being debated.

The Case For Inclusion

While this evidence might seem conclusive, a closer look at the facts demands that we use great caution before rejecting this text too quickly. First, while it is true that the *Johannine Comma* is present in only 10-11 late copies of the 5600 surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts, we should note that only around 500 of these actually include 1 John. Most are fragmentary in nature and not full volumes of all New Testament books. Of these only ten are themselves earlier than the 10th century.[2] One of these, the 4th century Codex Vaticanus has three dots in the margin to the left of the words **"there are three,"** which Philip B. Payne and Paul Canart have proven was a technique used as a scribal notation to show awareness of alternate readings (112-13).[3]

The earliest surviving Greek manuscripts of 1 John date to the time of Priscillian's undisputed quote of 1 John 5:7. This demands that we consider—if Priscillian quoted this passage would it not indicate its existence before his time and the time these Greek manuscripts were copied? Opponents to inclusion once argued that Priscillian himself had written the passage, but defenders of the text argue that earlier references to it prove its existence long before his time. For example, some time around 177 A.D. Athenagoras in his *Plea for the Christians* wrote of the unity of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit (10), which some have argued is an allusion to this text. Tertullian, around 215 in his work *Against Praxeas* while commenting on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit wrote, "the three are one" (25)—using the very wording of this passage. A similar quote is found in a work attributed to Origen (ca. 184-253), but possibly written by one of his students called *Selecta in Psalmos,* which says of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "for the three are one" (12.1633, on Ps. 122). Perhaps the most compelling example of this is in a text written about 250 by Cyprian known as his *Treatise.* He writes, "The Lord says, 'I and the Father are one,' and again, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit it is written, 'and the three are one'" (1.6, Pope). Cyprian's first quote is from John 10:30, but only in the *Johannine Comma* is it "written" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "and the three are one." Finally, Athanasius (ca. 296-373) who opposed the teachings of Arius denying the Deity of Christ, speaking of baptism referred to the "Thrice-Blessed Name" offered at baptism (i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), going on to claim, "John affirms, 'and the three are one'" (*Disputatio Contra Arium* 28.500, Pope). We must consider, where did John *affirm* this if not in the *Johannine Comma?* It is worth noting that while Tertullian and Cyprian wrote in Latin, Athenagoras, Origen, and Athanasius wrote in Greek. If these represent allusions to 1 John 5:7 they show its existence in Greek well before the time the manuscripts we have today were copied.

When it comes to Latin evidence, opponents to inclusion note its absence from the oldest Vulgate manuscript, Codex Fuldensis (ca. 541-46). There is a puzzling irony when it comes to this manuscript. The Vulgate was an official Latin version produced under the scholarly work of Jerome between 380-400 A.D. It was intended to correct flaws that had crept into Latin translations prior to his time. Jerome consulted Greek manuscripts to compare readings, and wrote prologues attached to many Vulgate manuscripts that explain his work. In the prologue attached to Fuldensis, when speaking about such errors, Jerome claims:

> …In that place where we read what is put down about the oneness of the Trinity in the First Epistle of John…we find there is much error from true faith by unfaithful translators, putting down in their own edition only three words, that is, 'water, blood, and Spirit,' and omitting the witness of the 'Father and Word and Spirit'…" (*Prologue to the Canonical Epistles,* Pope).

Jerome claims here that "unfaithful translators" omitted the *Johannine Comma.* Ironically, while Codex Fuldensis preserves Jerome's prologue it omits 1 John 5:7! Critics used to argue that this prologue was not written by Jerome, but its presence in a manuscript as early as Fuldensis has challenged that argument. If it is genuine, Jerome claims that

---

[1] **Greek evidence**: Biblical MSS – **61** (ca. 1520); **88m** (ca. 1000, margin ca. 1500), **177m** (ca. 1000, margin ca. 1500), **221m** (ca. 900, margin ca. 14-1500), **429m** (ca. 1300, margin ca. 1500), **629** (ca. 13-1400), **636m** (ca. 1500, margin ca. 1500), **918** (ca. 1500), **2318** (ca. 1700), **2473** (ca. 1700); Lectionaries – **60** (1021), **173** (ca. 900).

[2] **Early Greek Manuscripts that Include 1 John: ℵ** (ca. 300), **A** (ca. 400), **B** (ca. 300), **K** (ca. 800), **L** (ca. 700), **P** (ca. 800), **Ψ** (ca. 800), **048** (ca. 400), **049** (ca. 800), **0296** (ca. 500).

[3] Payne, B. Philip and Paul Canart. "The Originality of Text-Critical Symbols in Codex Vaticanus" *Novum Testamentum* 42 (2000) 105-13.