

# "A Reply to James White on 1 John 5:1 and the Order of Faith and Regeneration"

by Brian Abasciano

Leighton Flowers interviewed me on his “Soteriology 101” podcast about the claims of James White concerning the Greek of 1 John 5:1 and the order of faith and regeneration. The podcast episode can be found [here](#) and on [“Soteriology 101”’s iTunes page](#). I provided some follow-up comments [here](#). White has now [responded in his own podcast](#), which aired on Friday April 15, 2016. The purpose of this article is to assess White’s response. I will refer to White’s comments from his podcast on March 17, 2016 as his original comments, and his comments from his podcast on Friday April 15, 2016 as his latest comments.

(1) White makes much of the fact that Flowers’ interview of me only took into consideration the last part of Whites’ original comments on the issue of the order of faith and regeneration with respect to 1 John 5:1, and thus got his position as presented in that podcast wrong. This is true. I was given a time mark from which to watch White’s comments for the interview. So I watched the section and answered the interview questions accordingly. This was an unfortunate mistake, but it turns out to be an irrelevant one with respect to the basic issue. As White acknowledges, I did address the position he holds at the end of the interview. He complains that there was 50 minutes of interview before I addressed his specific position. But the section of the interview in which I address his specific position is still around 20 minutes long—hardly insubstantial. Moreover, his specific position is still grammatically problematic. Having listened to the rest of White’s original comments, I will now address those comments along with the comments in his latest reply.

(2) In his latest reply, White gives the impression that his comments in the original podcast were going into detail for what he argued briefly in his book, *The Potter’s Freedom*. But his position in the book seems to be the one that he now rejects, that the grammar itself of a present participle combined with a perfect indicative demands that the action of the perfect precede that of the participle. In the book he writes of 1 John 5:1,

Generally such a passage would be understood to present the following order of events: 1) Believe that Jesus is the Christ, and 2) you are born of God. Yet, the original readers of this text would not jump to such a conclusion. In reality, the most literal rendering would be, “Every one believing (present tense participle,  $\delta$  πιστεύων, emphasizing both the on-going action as well as the individuality of saving faith, “each believing person”) that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God (a perfect passive verb,  $\gammaεγ\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ , “has been born by the agency of God”). . . The one believing that Jesus is the Christ *has been born of God*. If a person is now believing that Jesus is the Christ in a true and saving fashion, they are now doing so because, as a completed action in

the past, they were born again through the work and agency of God (287-88; emphasis original).

The clear implication in that section of White's book is that the tenses used communicate the action of the perfect indicative (being born of God) as preceding the action of the present participle (believing). White implies this by saying that the original readers would not think that the verse conveys believing prior to being born of God because of how the verse reads in its original language. He then explains the point by highlighting the Greek tenses used and emphasizing the action of the present participle as having to do with *now* and the action of the perfect indicative as having to do with a completed action in the past causing the action in the present. He then only brings in the argument from verbal parallel as a confirmatory point, "A means of testing the consistency of the exegesis [already] offered of this passage" (288). As we have seen, that exegesis implied that the combination of tenses indicated the action of the perfect indicative (regeneration) as preceding that of the present participle (believing). That is a different point and emphasis than his present position. The main argument in his book is basically what I addressed in that first 50 minutes that White thought irrelevant.

(3) It is good to see that White no longer argues or implies that the tenses themselves indicate that the action of the perfect indicative (regeneration) precedes the action of the present substantival participle (believing). However, the rest of his original podcast comments made some errors regarding Greek grammar/syntax and his argument is still unpersuasive. Around the 59:43 mark, he said that when we have a present participle with a perfect finite verb, we are able to determine the relationship of the respective actions to one another. But that is not necessarily true, and it does not come from the grammar. There are general tendencies that can be assumed (and the perfect indicative preceding the present participle is not one of them), but in any particular case, context would have to determine the relationship, and often it might not be clear.

Then, around 1:02 of his original podcast comments, White said, presumably of the basic tendency of Greek grammar, that the perfect indicative is either concurrent or antecedent to the present participle. But that is false. As I documented in my *Evangelical Quarterly* article on 1 John 5:1 ("Does Regeneration Precede Faith? The Use of 1 John 5:1 as a Proof Text," *Evangelical Quarterly* 84.4 [2012], 307-322), the tendency of Greek grammar is for the participle to be concurrent or to precede the action of the indicative (though there are varying views among grammarians, which my article lays out, none of them favorable to White's position). The present participle is especially a candidate for preceding when it is articular, as in 1 John 5:1. There is no particular tendency for the perfect indicative to precede the present participle. But as I explained in the interview, the rough simultaneity that often obtains can allow for logical order and precedence of one or the other. But that is not indicated by the tenses. They suggest simultaneity and allow for logical order to obtain.

(4) In his latest comments, White reads from Daniel B. Wallace's distinguished *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* around the 1:02:30 mark, but shows further misunderstanding of the grammar Wallace discusses. First, he makes an odd statement that with a perfect verb, one has to include

its time relationship to the (presumably present) participle in translation to avoid serious confusion. However, this is just not so. Indeed, the very passage we are discussing and the parallels to it that White brings up are translated by virtually all translations without indication of the time relationship between the participle and the perfect indicative.

Second, Wallace states that the present participle “can be broadly antecedent to the time of the main verb, especially if it is articular (and thus adjectival; cf. Mark 6:14; Eph. 2:13)” (625-26). White notes that the participle in 1 John 5:1 is articular, but then says that it is not really adjectival. But it is a point of *basic* Greek grammar that substantival participles are adjectival (see e.g., Wallace, 616; William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* [3<sup>rd</sup> ed.], 272-73).

Third, White reads the portion of Wallace’s grammar where he states that “the present participle is occasionally subsequent *in a sense* to the time of the main verb” (626; emphasis original), and White comments that this is what we have here [in 1 John 5:1]. However, the very next sentence White reads disqualifies that *occasional* possibility as applying to 1 John 5:1: “This is so when the participle has a telic (purpose) or result flavor to it (cf. Eph 2:15).” 1 John 5:1 does not contain an instance of the participle with a telic or result flavor to it. White also fails to read the next sentence, which further shuts down the possibility of the present participle being used of subsequent time: “But as Robertson points out, ‘It is not strictly true that here [in the topic of present participle usage] the present participle means future or subsequent time. It is only that the purpose goes on coincident with the verb and beyond.’”

Finally, in that same section of comments, White gave some odd reasoning for why the participle would not be concurrent in 2:29—that it would convey being born every time someone performs a righteous act—reasoning that suggests misunderstanding of how simultaneity works between participles and indicatives. I do not think that practicing righteousness brings about becoming born again. But since that was the example White used in his comments—if the participle were antecedent there, it would not mean that every time a righteous act were performed, the person would be born, but that practicing righteousness would lead to the state of being spiritually alive, born again.

(5) Around the 58 minute mark of White’s latest comments he notes that *πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων* (“whoever believes” or “everyone who believes”), which appears in 1 John 5:1, is also used in John 3:16, and argues that viewing the phrase in 1 John as giving characteristics of believers conflicts with viewing the phrase as generic in John 3:16 as Arminians normally do. But this argument relies on a faulty premise, that speaking of believers or characteristics of believers is necessarily specific rather than generic. Indeed, Wallace mentions in his *Greek Grammar* that a generic noun “categorizes or stresses the characteristics of a given class” (228). “Believers” is a generic idea as is speaking of characteristics of believers. These are generalities. It is like speaking about Americans and characteristics of Americans. That is a generic idea. It is when you identify specific individuals like Joe or James or the President that you are getting specific. Speaking about Joe’s or Jim’s characteristics is also specific. As Wallace observes, “The *πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων* (or *ἀγαπῶν, ποιῶν*, etc.) formula is always or almost always generic. As such it is

expected to involve a *gnomic* idea. Most of these instances involve the present participle” (615; emphasis original; cf. 523). Wallace goes on to specifically identify  $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma \delta\acute{\omicron} \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega\nu$  in John 3:16 as gnomic (620) and elsewhere notes that a substantival participle with  $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$ , which is what we have in 1 John 5:1, is especially indicative of a generic subject.

White seems to misunderstand the nature of generic utterances, perhaps especially where the generic sense applies or fits into identification of specific characteristics or truths about the members of the class of person in view. For example, the generic sense of John 3:16’s reference to believers comes in the fact that no particular person is specified as a believer. There is a conditional sense to the construction used. If someone believes in Jesus, whoever that person may be, then that person will be saved. The sense is similar in 1 John 5:1: if someone believes that Jesus is the Christ, whoever that person might be, then that person has been born of God.

(6) Around 11:55 in White’s latest comments, he speaks about the ongoing nature of saving faith in the Apostle John’s language. I agree that John saw saving faith as ongoing faith (on this point, see Wallace’s grammar again, now at 620-21), but White gets his facts wrong here and might show a misunderstanding of Greek tense in his comments on this point. He points out that John 2 and 8 refer to faith using the aorist rather than the present tense to indicate faith that is not saving, a consistent pattern in John according to White such that aorist faith is false faith. Whether or not the references White has in mind are references to false or saving faith (I take no position on that here), we will grant that they do refer to false faith for the sake of argument. The fact is that John does use the aorist in his Gospel for genuine faith, even in the context of one of the aorist/false faith references White has in mind! White cites the content of John 2:23-25 as an example of aorist/false faith in John. But immediately prior to those verses, in John 2:22, the aorist is used of genuine faith: “So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (NASB). Other instances of the aorist in John of genuine faith include (this list does not include every possible example) 2:11; 4:39, 41 (cf. v. 42), 50, 53; 7:39 (using an aorist substantival participle); 17:8; 20:8, 29 (also an aorist substantival participle). White’s comments just do not hold up here. It is true that the present substantival participle of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega$  (“to believe”) is used much more often in John than the aorist substantival participle of the word, and that this likely stresses the need for continuing faith, but it is not true that aorist faith in John is false faith or anything of the sort.

The reason that I said White might show a misunderstanding of Greek tense in his comments in this section is that he speaks about the non-continuing nature of the aorist. That is a classic misunderstanding of the aorist tense. Non-continuation is not an inherent part of the aorist. However, due to a pause in White’s speech at the critical point at which he says “in John” (at the 12:50 mark) that leaves it uncertain what the “in John” qualification applied to, it is uncertain whether White meant to indicate that the aorist has a non-continuing nature in itself that gets used by John for faith that does not continue, or if he meant that the aorist generally has a non-continuing nature *in John*, or if he meant that the aorist of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega$  specifically has a non-continuing nature in John. No matter what he meant, I have documented that his position is wrong. It is just that the extent of his misunderstanding is uncertain.

(7) White's rhetoric in both podcasts was at times unbecoming dialogue among brothers in Christ due to its uncharitable nature. Just one specific example: around the 18:10 mark of his latest comments, White suggested that Flowers interviewed me instead of inviting any of the "big names" at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary because they are not up to dealing with this issue (of the Greek grammar and syntax of 1 John 5:1). That really is an outrageous, invidious, arrogant, and caustic comment that has no place in this discussion and serves as just one example of a pattern of troubling manner in argumentation on White's part in this interaction over 1 John 5:1 and the order of faith and regeneration. Part of White's troubling manner of argumentation is something that I pointed out in [our former exchange over Acts 13:48](#)—peppering his comments with ridicule and expressions of shocked incredulity. I mention it here to warn those who listen to White's comments not to be tricked into agreement with him because his manner of presentation makes him *seem* right via a confident style that lacks actual substance in the argument being put forward. Do not let shock or ridicule substitute for actual substance of argument.

(8) Another rhetorical concern with White's part of this discussion is his misrepresentation of Arminian theology. Observers of this debate should be aware that White frequently fails to get Arminian theology right. But that compromises his arguments against Arminian theology. Several examples may be seen starting around the 1:15:56 mark of his latest comments, where he portrays the Arminian view to be that we bring up continuing faith within ourselves rather than God working it in us, that saving faith is not a gift granted by God, and that Arminian theology is not overly concerned about being consistent other than being consistent in affirming the autonomy of man over against the autonomy of God, and indeed, that it denies the autonomy of God. All of that is false characterization of Arminian theology. Now I understand that all of that might be White's beliefs about the logical implications of Arminian theology. But it is not what Arminian theology actually teaches. Most Arminians would hold that (1) God works continuing faith in us, though not irresistibly, (2) that saving faith is a gift of God, yet not one he bestows irresistibly, but like most gifts, one that he gives resistibly, (3) that Arminian theology is very concerned with being consistent, and indeed this is partly why it rejects Calvinistic theology, (4) that man's autonomy is subordinated to God's autonomy, and (5) that God is autonomous and his will is supreme over man's. White might want to claim that Arminian theology is inconsistent in holding these points, but it is counterproductive to misrepresent the Arminian view. Moreover, misrepresenting comments tend to have the effect of poisoning the well against Arminian theology, giving the impression that our view of 1 John 5:1 is part of man-centered, works-based, inconsistent, God-dishonoring doctrine, potentially biasing the audience unfairly against our view.

(9) We finally turn to interaction concerning what White considers his main argument, the parallels with 1 John 5:1 in 2:29 and 4:7, where characteristics that are undoubtedly preceded by regeneration are identified by a present substantival participle with regeneration described by a perfect indicative. Around 1:10:59 of his latest comments, White responds to my first point, which is, "It does not follow that because 1 John identifies other phenomena as the result of regeneration that every phenomenon it connects with regeneration is its result. It could equally be that another phenomenon associated with regeneration is actually the cause of the latter or

without any causal relationship to it.” White’s response is basically that John using the same construction with regeneration preceding the action of the present participles in 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 demands the same thing when the same construction is used in 5:1 and that my position puts John at fault for using the same construction differently. He goes on to suggest that I hold my position because White’s position, the obvious position of the text, contradicts my theology. But this response misfires on multiple levels.

First, it sidesteps the point, which is undeniably true. White should concede its truth and then argue that the parallels make it more likely that another result of regeneration is being identified in 1 John 5:1. But his rhetorical style allows only for manifesting absolute confidence. This leads into a second problem, and that is that White’s rhetorical flourish to the effect that my position means John made a mistake is utterly question begging. It assumes White’s position is true and that it is so obvious, that John would have to have made a mistake if he meant otherwise. It is unreasonable argumentation.

Third, White overplays the significance of the parallel constructions, and in so doing, reveals further misunderstanding of Greek grammar and syntax as well as erroneous exegetical methodology. There is a lot to unpack here; so I will set it out in lettered subsections.

(a) White seems to be ignorant of or confuse the distinction between an author using certain language about an action that happens to be characterized by characteristic x on the one hand with an author using certain language to express characteristic x about an action on the other hand. In the case of 1 John 5:1, there is a profound difference between (1) the suggestion that John intended to communicate the order of the present participle and perfect indicative by his very use of those forms and tenses vs. (2) the idea that the use of those forms and tenses together portrays the actions in view as simultaneous and allows for a logical order between them that the grammar itself does not indicate. Number 2 is how Greek grammar normally works. White acknowledges that but seems to contend that John using the same pattern twice when the action of the perfect indicative precedes that of the present participle means that John intended his use of the present participle and perfect indicative together to communicate the order of these elements of his statement. But that is not the way Greek grammar and tenses normally work generally, or specifically with individual authors, which betrays further misunderstanding of Greek grammar and semantics on White’s part. Normally, if an author writing in Greek uses grammatical structures that do not in themselves communicate nuance x, then we can assume that the author did not intend to communicate nuance x by his grammar. That nuance, if present, would be communicated by other, contextual factors.

(b) Now, a case could be made that an author did intend to communicate nuance x by his grammar if he always used that specific grammar with that nuance *many times*. But John does not use the precise grammar and syntax White points to many times. He uses it only two times other than in 1 John 5:1. That is exceedingly minimal data, which cannot validly be used to establish fixed usage. It makes White’s repeated references to a “consistent pattern” in John’s usage puzzling and misleading. It is gross overstatement.

(c) White also errs in insisting that 1 John 5:10 is not a parallel to 1 John 5:1. It uses the same basic construction, an articular present participle with the perfect indicative. White points out minor differences in 1 John 5:10 from 1 John 5:1, 2:29, and 4:7 (which all have the exact same structure) that he claims make it not a relevant parallel, specifically the use of a different verb, the use of the active voice of the verb instead of the passive, the absence of the Greek word  $\pi\alpha\varsigma$  (“all, every”) that occurs in 1 John 5:1, and the fact that 1 John 5:10 (unlike 1 John 5:1) uses a negative particle that negates the action of the participle. However, these are not the types of elements that affect the temporal relationship between articular participles and indicative verbs. The use of a particular verb, an adjective ( $\pi\alpha\varsigma$ ), and the passive voice, for example, do not suddenly cause participle and indicative verb tenses to relate differently.

The use of an articular present participle with a perfect indicative is something of a distinctive Johannine speech pattern, though not too frequent, used in John 3:18, 1 John 2:29, 4:7, 5:1, and 5:10. That is five times all together, one time in John’s Gospel and four times in his first epistle. In the occurrences in the Gospel and 1 John 5:10, the action of the articular present participle clearly precedes that of the perfect indicative logically. In 1 John 2:29 and 4:7, the action of the perfect indicative seems to logically precede that of the present participle. But it is not the minor syntactical differences that signal that. White only cites theological reasons from outside 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 for concluding that the action of the perfect indicative (regeneration) precedes that of the articular present participle in these passages. He then uses that aspect of 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 to insist that 5:1 must share that same aspect due to sharing the same syntactical structure. But again, it is not the syntax that signals the order of the present participle and perfect indicative except that it represents them as roughly simultaneous and *allows* for there to be a logical order between them undetermined by the grammar.

(d) One of the problems with White’s exegetical method in this matter is that he appears to assume that the main purpose of these texts that mention regeneration is to indicate the order of the action of the participle and regeneration (expressed by the perfect indicative in these passages). So he brings the question, “what is the order of the action of the participle and regeneration?” to 1 John 2:29 and 4:7, as if their purpose is to answer that question. But what if their main purpose is *not* to answer that question? What if their main purpose lies elsewhere? Then White’s whole argument falls apart. There would be no reason to think that the similar language was meant to suggest an order to the action of the participle and regeneration.

It just so happens that the primary purpose of these passages is different than White’s position demands and accords with what various commentators from both the Arminian and Calvinist perspectives have concluded was one of John’s primary purposes in the whole epistle—to give assurance of salvation to believers. I discussed this purpose in the podcast interview I gave and in my *Evangelical Quarterly* article on 1 John 5:1 (and White never attempts to refute this point, which was my third main point in the section at the end of my interview in which I address White’s main argument). Leighton Flowers has also discussed this purpose. But here, I will let Calvinist scholar Sam Storms articulate the matter with respect to 1 John 5:1:

John says in 5:1 that whoever is presently believing in Christ has in the past been born or begotten of God. I.e., a present action of believing is evidence of a past experience of begetting. Is John then saying that new birth or regeneration always precedes and causes saving faith in Christ? Although I believe regeneration (new birth) *does* precede and cause faith, I do *not* believe that is John's point here. . .

John's point is simply that these activities are the evidence of the new birth and hence of salvation. Their absence is the evidence that regeneration has not taken place. He makes this point, not because he wants to demonstrate the cause/effect relationship between regeneration and faith, but because he wants to provide the church with tests by which to discern between true and spurious "believers" (Sam Storms, "First John 5:1-21," <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/first-john-5:1-21>).

White charges that I hold my view not because of exegesis or biblical evidence, but merely because I am beholden to my theological tradition that trumps Scripture for me. But then why does a reputable Calvinist scholar like Sam Storms hold to the same basic position as I do on 1 John 5:1? Could it be White who is so beholden to his theological tradition that he cannot even see the evidence for a view of a text that is compatible with Arminianism when he has touted that text in favor of Calvinism? Might it be that Storms is simply more willing to subject himself to Scripture and allow exegesis to dictate his view rather than a concern to conform the text to support of Calvinism?

One of the troubling characteristics of White's argumentation in this exchange has been a seeming inability to grant any plausibility to points in favor of a different reading of the text than his. For my part, I do not see validity to the way White has argued for his position, as I have been explaining. But I do see it as a reasonable position to hold that faith is best taken as a result of regeneration in 1 John 5:1 in light of the facts that there are several passages in 1 John that indicate the results of regeneration and two of them have the exact same structure as 1 John 5:1 (2:29 and 4:7). I do not find that compelling for reasons laid out here and in my interview and article on 1 John 5:1. But it is not an unreasonable view. What is unreasonable is arguing as White does that the syntactical parallel among 2:29, 4:7, and 5:1 demands that John's grammar in those verses itself communicates the order of the perfect indicative (regeneration) preceding the present participle without any other possibility being reasonable.

The view that 1 John 5:1 and similar passages in 1 John have the primary purpose of assuring believers of their salvation, articulated by Storms above, goes along with the fact that John used grammar that did *not* specify the order of the present participle and the perfect indicative. Indeed, the grammar he did use practically excludes indication of the perfect indicative preceding the present participle while suggesting that it is roughly simultaneous (allowing for logical order



either way) or follows the participle (see section 4 above). Further support for this point is that 1 John 2:29 deals with a phenomenon that would have to involve chronological order, not just logical order, leaving no room for the grammar to function as White claims unless John is deviating from normal Greek grammar. For 2:29 says, “Whoever practices righteousness has been born of him,” but practicing righteousness would have to come chronologically after being born of God, not just logically. It is not as if as soon as someone is born of God, they take righteous action without any time distinction between their regeneration and their *then* taking righteous action. What this suggests is the view that Storms seems to advocate, viz. that John does not have the initial act of righteousness relative to the new birth in view at all, logically or chronologically, but is speaking about the present state of the believer and how the practice of righteousness shows that present state, begun sometime in the past, to be the born-of-God state. That fits within the grammar that John uses as well as with one of the overriding purposes of the epistle and avoids the need to suggest that John is going against normal Greek grammar.

(10) The second point I made in the interview for not finding the parallels in 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 as compelling reasons for thinking 1 John 5:1 presents regeneration as preceding faith was that there is a specific, key contextual factor involved in each of the other passages that suggests some sort of causative role for regeneration but is not present in 1 John 5:1a, namely, that God has a certain quality (whatever it is in each specific case), and that therefore, the one who is begotten of him, his child, will be like his father, but this is not the case with 1 John 5:1 because the believer is not particularly being like God the Father in believing in Jesus since the Father does not believe in Christ in a saving way as humans do. Believing in Jesus as the Christ is not a character quality of the Father. Right off the bat, White mischaracterizes my argument. He paraphrases it as saying that being born of God has nothing to do with the ongoing nature of our faith. But I did not say that at all, and in fact said the opposite in the interview. I made the point that being born of God does indeed foster ongoing faith in us. The point is rather that 1 John 5:1 is not addressing how regeneration relates to the beginning of faith in us. Regeneration fostering faith in the believer does not necessarily mean that regeneration started faith in the believer, just as, for example, the practice of attending prayer meetings fostering faith in the believer does not necessarily mean that attending prayer meetings is what initially brought the person to faith.

The second aspect of White’s response to my second point seems to be that God does have a character quality that would be mirrored in us believing in Jesus—faithfulness or consistency. But that does not really match believing in Jesus as the Messiah for salvation. It is not particularly a part of God’s character to believe in Jesus in that way like sinful human beings do. What the quality of faithfulness/consistency matches is the born-of-God state fostering our continuance in faith, which is precisely what I said that regeneration does do. But none of that addresses how we initially come to faith or whether regeneration causes us to come to faith initially.

White claims that the point is “one of the most artificially shallow things” he has ever seen. Astonishingly, he claims that it is not drawn from the text. But commentators have noticed this aspect of “family resemblance” (“like Father, like Son”) in passages like 1 John 2:29 and 4:7, but *not* mentioned it in relation to 5:1. I cited the commentary by I. Howard Marshall in my

*Evangelical Quarterly* article. But in case one wants to see it from a Calvinist commentator, one could look, for example, at Robert W. Yarborough, *1-3 John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) or Sam Storms' online comments in "First John 2:28-3:3," <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/first-john-2:28-3:3>. It is not as if the text explicitly says, "I am talking about the issue of family resemblance," but scholars exegeting the text see this obvious connection implied by the text and describe it in unpacking the text as good exegesis is supposed to do.

Around the 1:16:38 mark, White returns to his claim that my approach is the same as the Jehovah's Witnesses take to 2 Peter 1:1 and its use of the Granville Sharp construction in a text that evidences the deity of Christ. His claim is that I illegitimately try to build a wall between the use of the same construction as it appears in 1 John 5:1 and its uses in 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 in the exact same way as the JW's try to claim differences between the Granville Sharp construction in 2 Pet 1:1 and its other occurrences. But this shows a misunderstanding of the Greek grammatical issues involved. Identification is the actual meaning conveyed by the Granville Sharp construction, but the JW's object to its application to 2 Peter 1:1 because of minor differences in the syntax. (By the way, while I agree that the construction applies in 2 Peter 1:1, it is not just JW's that contest it, but some legitimate grammarians. It is not simply a matter of whether someone is orthodox or not for his opinion on the question of 2 Peter 1:1.) But the grammar/syntax of 1 John 2:29, 4:7, and 5:1 does not itself indicate the order of the actions involved.

Ironically, it is White who argues regarding 1 John 5:1 as the JW's do regarding 2 Peter 1:1. For they point to minor syntactical differences in 2 Peter 1:1 from the other uses of the Granville Sharp construction in 2 Peter to argue that 1:1 does not refer to Jesus as God. Compare White arguing that the minor syntactical differences in 1 John 2:29, 4:7, and 5:1 from other instances in John involving an articular present participle combined with a perfect indicative make 2:29, 4:7, and 5:1 a special Johannine usage that differs from normal Greek grammar. Take this example of JW apologist Greg Stafford arguing the JW position on 2 Peter 1:1:

We can see that four out of the five articulated nouns are the same; one is significantly different. In 2 Peter 1:1 we have *θεός* and in the other four Peter uses *κύριος*. The question we ask is, Why would Peter call Christ "God" in verse 1, but in 1:11, 2:20, 3:2, and 3:18 use "Lord"? . . . he uses "Lord" for Jesus in a number of instances. . . However, when referring to the Father, Peter uses *θεός* 45 times, excluding 2 Peter 1:1 (Greg Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Huntington Beach: Elihu Books, 2000, 404).

Notice how similarly the JW apologist argues to White. He argues that a minor difference in Peter's use of the construction in 2 Peter 1:1 means it does not carry the same import as the

construction normally does in 2 Peter—and though he does not mention it specifically, generally in Greek grammar. And his numbers are much more impressive than White’s. Rather than 2 instances White can cite in 1 John, Stafford points to 4 in 2 Peter (admittedly there are only 4 instances of the present participle/perfect indicative construction in John outside of 1 John 5:1, two that White can point to and two that go against him). And then he points out that Peter uses θεός of the Father a whopping 45 times excluding 2 Peter 1:1. Talk about a consistent pattern! Of course, we know that Stafford is wrong here in his conclusions, and so is White in regard to 1 John 5:1. In the former case, normal Greek grammar identifies Jesus with God and minor syntactical difference does not change that. In the latter case, normal Greek grammar portrays the action of the present participle and perfect indicative as roughly simultaneous (or the present participle preceding the perfect indicative) allowing for logical order but not indicating it, and minor syntactical differences do not change that.

(11) The fourth point I made in the interview against White’s main argument based on 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 is that faith is relatively unique among the other phenomena related to regeneration in the epistle, for it is depicted as causing these other qualities not to mention additional ones. White offers no answer for this point. Instead, he focuses on one particular element of the point, and that is that Johannine theology holds that spiritual life comes by faith, making faith logically prior to regeneration, which is the beginning of spiritual life. White accuses me of equivocating γεγέννηται (being born [of God]) and life. He specifies that γεγέννηται/being born of God refers to entering into life. That is basically right. More precisely, it is the bestowing of spiritual life/the beginning of spiritual life. I did not simply equivocate regeneration and spiritual life, but identified regeneration as the *beginning* of spiritual life. White misses the point. The beginning of spiritual life is still part of spiritual life. And if faith brings spiritual life, then it brings the beginning of spiritual life; it brings regeneration.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Fertilization of a human egg brings life. Anything that can be said to bring life, such as intercourse, can also be said to bring fertilization. Fertilization is the analogical equivalent of regeneration. Anything that can be said to bring spiritual life can also be said to bring regeneration. Faith brings spiritual life; so faith brings regeneration.

(12) In conclusion, White’s response to my comments on his arguments concerning 1 John 5:1 manifest numerous errors concerning Greek grammar, exegetical methodology, and Arminian theology. Observers of this debate should be careful not to mistake White’s strong rhetoric for substantive argumentation. His argumentation for his view of 1 John 5:1 is deeply flawed. It is good that White has clarified that he does not think that the tenses in 1 John 5:1 themselves indicate that the action of the perfect indicative (regeneration) precedes the action of the present substantival participle (believing). And as I mentioned, the parallels in 1 John 2:29 and 4:7 might be taken to weigh in favor of taking 1 John 5:1 to indicate faith as the result of regeneration, but not enough to be compelling in light of grammar, context, and the distinctive and crucial role of faith in 1 John and Johannine theology. But White’s argumentation to the effect that there is no other reasonable conclusion that can be drawn than that those texts mean 1 John 5:1 places regeneration prior to faith is without merit. First John 5:1 simply does not work as a proof text for regeneration preceding faith despite White straining to use it as one.