

1 John 5.20

^{NASB} “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

Joh. Ed. Huthe:

“As is well known, views have differed from old times about the meaning of οὗτος. While the Arians understand οὗτος of God, the orthodox refer it to the immediately preceding ἐν τῷ υἱῷ Ἰ. Χρ., and use this passage as a proof of the divinity of the Son. This interpretation remained the prevailing one in the church...and against this the Socinians, and then Grotius, Wetstein, the English Anti-Trinitarians, and the German Rationalists followed the opposite view...The dispute cannot be settled on grammatical lines, for οὗτος can be referred both to τὸν ἀληθινόν and also to τῷ υἱῷ...The former reference...is supported by the expression: ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεός; for, in the first place, it is more natural to understand here the same subject as is previously designated by ὁ ἀληθινός, than any other; and, in the second place, the Father and the Son, God and Jesus Christ, are always so definitely distinguished throughout the whole Epistle, that it would be strange if, at the close of it, and, moreover, just after both subjects have been similarly distinguished immediately before, Christ—without further explanation, too—should be described as ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεός, especially as this designation is never ascribed to the Son in the writings of John, definitely though the divinity of the Son is taught in them.”¹

Glen W. Barker:

“He” in 20b is literally “this one” (houtos)...Grammatically the pronoun most naturally refers to Jesus Christ. Westcott, (p. 187) however, argues that in terms of subject emphasis it more naturally refers backwards to God, who earlier in the text was designated as the one who is true (20a): “This Being—this One who is true, who is revealed through and in His Son, with whom we are united by His Son—is the true God and life eternal.” Stott supports Westcott, noting that all “three references to ‘the true’ are to the same Person, the Father, and the additional points made in the apparent final repetition are that it is *this* One, namely the God made known by Jesus Christ, who is *the true God*, and that, besides this, He is *eternal life*. As He is both light and love (i.5, iv.8), so He is also life” (Stott, p. 196; cf. Brooke, pp. 152-53; Dodd, *Johanne Epistles*, p.140).²

John W. Stott:

“The final sentence of verse 20 runs: *He is the true God and eternal life*. To whom does *he* refer? Grammatically speaking, it would normally refer to the nearest preceding subject, namely *his Son Jesus Christ*. If so, this would be the most unequivocal statement of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, which the champions of orthodoxy were quick to exploit against the heresy of Arius. Luther and Calvin adopted this view. Certainly it is by no means an impossible interpretation. Nevertheless, ‘the most natural reference’ (Westcott) is to *him who is true*. In this way the three references to ‘the true’ are to the same person, the Father, and the additional points made in the apparent final repetition are that it is this one, namely the God made known by Jesus Christ, who is both *the true God* and *eternal life*. As he is both light and love (1.5; 4.8), so he is also life, himself the only source of life (Jn. 5.26) and the giver of life in Jesus Christ (11). The whole verse is strongly reminiscent of John 17.3, for there as here eternal life is defined in terms of knowing God, both Father and Son.”³

¹ Joh. Ed. Huthe, Th. D., *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament*, 1884, pp. 622-623.

² Glen W. Barker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 357.

³ John W. Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letters of John (Revised Edition)*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 197-198.