The Phrase ἐν τούτῳ in 1 John

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Introduction

The Greek demonstrative οὗτος 'this' may occur together with a noun as in "this man" or it may occur alone, meaning 'this one'. When it occurs together with a noun, it is usually anaphoric; that is, it refers back to something mentioned in the previous context. When it occurs without a noun, it is quite often cataphoric; that is, it refers to something which follows. The anaphoric usages are predominant. (For a useful discussion of τοῦτο and ταῦτα, the neuter forms of οὗτος, see Callow 1978, Hale 1975, and Turnbull 1986.) In the first part of the article "Who Is This Generation?" (Larsen 1985:22-32), I have given examples of both the normal anaphoric use and the somewhat exceptional cataphoric use of οὗτος.

The phrase ἐν τούτῳ –without the demonstrative being attached to any noun–is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament. Twelve of these occur in 1 John. The phrase is clearly a favorite of John. It occurs five times in John's Gospel but only once in Luke's Gospel and never in Matthew or Mark. Taking into consideration the short length of 1 John, the phrase is extremely common there.

The phrase ἐν τούτῳ ('in this' or 'by this') can also be either anaphoric or cataphoric. In cases where the phrase is sandwiched between two statements which deal with the same point, it may be interpreted as both anaphoric and cataphoric at the same time. The occurrence in Luke 10:20 is probably cataphoric, but since it is a sandwich case, it could also be interpreted as anaphoric. The five occurrences in John's Gospel split evenly, two being cataphoric, two anaphoric, and one being both. Nine instances in Acts and Paul's letters are all anaphoric. Of the twelve occurrences in 1 John, one is clearly anaphoric while the rest are probably cataphoric. Therefore, the usage in 1 John is not only remarkable by its unusually high frequency but also by being almost exclusively cataphoric. It is one of the idiosyncrasies of 1 John.

One of the reasons for this may be that 1 John is expository in form (but in function often hortatory–see Longacre 1983). The ἐν preposition indicates reason or means and therefore naturally occurs more often in expository and hortatory discourse. It should also be noted that Paul often uses τούτῳ (without a noun) cataphorically in a way that is similar to John's use of ἐν τούτῳ. The function is to add emphasis to the content which the demonstrative anticipates (cf. Callow 1978:1, quoting Winer).

1 Ἐν τούτῳ in the Gospels of Luke and John

It is interesting to note that all six occurrences of ἐν τούτῳ in the Gospels occur in non-narrative sections or, more precisely, in speech quotations with hortatory content. The use of the phrase is therefore a hortative rather than a narrative feature.

1.1 Cataphoric reference

We shall first look at the places where the reference is cataphoric:

Luke 10:20 Nevertheless, in this [ἐν τούτῳ] do not rejoice that [ὅτι] the spirits are submitting to you.

In this context it does not make sense to take the ἐν τούτῳ phrase as anaphoric because then the ὅτι would be hanging in the air, and there is nothing in the preceding context it could clearly refer to. Therefore, it is best interpreted as cataphoric. This interpretation is followed by all translations except GNB which chooses to completely ignore the phrase and translate the following ὅτι as 'because'. NEB, Phillips, and Living Bible have translated the phrase well. We see how ἐν τούτῳ is anticipating and

needs to be complemented by the ὅτι clause. It would be possible to say only: do not rejoice that (or because) the spirits are submitting to you. The purpose of the ἐν τούτῳ phrase is to put extra emphasis on what the speaker is going to say. This emphasis is often a matter of contrast. In this particular context Jesus is contrasting a valid reason for rejoicing with an invalid reason.

John 9:30 The man answered, "Now in this [ἐν τούτῳ] there is amazement that [ὅτι] you don't know where he comes from…"

Again, the construction emphasizes not the amazement itself, but the reason for the amazement, namely that they don't "know where he comes from." To this unlearned man it is obvious that Jesus came from God, since he had cured his blindness, but the learned men did not want to accept such an obvious fact. To get the flavor of the emphasis, it may be best to reconstruct the sentence something like: You say you don't know where he comes from! Now that is very amazing! How could he have opened my eyes? NEB and JB handle this text well, which I cannot say about the GNB.

John 15:8 In this [ἐν τούτῳ] is my Father glorified that [ἵνα] you bear much fruit.

In this case the complement is introduced by ἵνα rather than ὅτι. Without having made a detailed study of the difference, I have a feeling that ἵνα is mainly used in an irrealis (hypothetical or future) situation while ὅτι normally indicates a realis (factual or past) situation.

In John 15:12, the nominative case of the same demonstrative is used (αὕτη) in a cataphoric sense, while in John 15:8, the preposition ἐν precedes the demonstrative in order to show the means-result connection between the two clauses: By means of you bearing much fruit my Father will be glorified. By using the ἐν τούτῳ construction, the author emphasizes the means clause over and above the result clause.

1.2 Anaphoric reference

John 4:36-37 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. And thus [ἐν τούτῳ, 'in that', 'by that'] the saying "One sows and one reaps" is true.

The phrase ἐν τούτῳ occurs at the beginning of v. 37, and it refers back to the whole content of vv. 34-36 about sowing the Word to the Samaritans and reaping the harvest of people who receive eternal life.

John 16:30 Now we understand that you know everything and you don't need to have anyone questioning you. That makes [ἐν τούτῳ] us believe that you came from God.

Syntactically, this instance could also be cataphoric, in which case it should be translated "We believe in this: You came from God." However, the context seems to favor the anaphoric interpretation, and this is followed by all the translations that I know of.

1.3 Ambivalent reference

John 13:34-35 is a case where the reference seems to be both anaphoric and cataphoric:

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you, too, must love one another. By that/this [ἐν τούτῳ] will all people understand that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

There is no doubt about the important point, namely, "Love one another!" By means of that love

among the disciples, the world will see that they are truly his disciples. The phrase ἐν τούτῳ emphasizes the means clause, both before and after. Grammatically, I think that the reference is cataphoric, but the meaning of the text is not affected whether one takes the reference as anaphoric or cataphoric. NIV does not translate ἐν τούτῳ, and the other translations have a number of different constructions which all say essentially the same thing.

2 The use of ἐν τούτῳ in 1 John

First let us look at the occurrence of ἐν τούτῳ in 2:4-5. In the surface structure there is no noun to which the demonstrative is attached, but ”person” or ”man” is clearly understood from the context. The demonstrative is used anaphorically with a contrastive meaning:

1 John 2:4-5 The one who says, “I know him” without keeping his commandments, is a liar. In that one [ἐν τούτῳ] the truth is not. But if someone keeps his word, truly, in that one [ἐν τούτῳ] has the love of God been perfected.

This is a quite normal use of the demonstrative as an anaphoric contrast, so it is not counted among the twelve instances of John’s special usages of the phrase.

Now let us look at the other cases where the demonstrative is used without noun either expressed or understood. Of these twelve cases, one is anaphoric and the other eleven I interpret as cataphoric. The anaphoric example is:

1 John 3:18-19 Dear ones, let us not love in word and speech, but in action and truth. By (doing) that [ἐν τούτῳ] we shall know that we belong to the truth.

The remaining eleven instances of ἐν τούτῳ follow in the order they occur with a few comments along the way.

1 John 2:3 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] we can rest assured that we have come to know him, (namely) if we keep his commandments.

The relationship between the clause ”if we keep his commandments” and ”we can rest assured that we have come to know him” is again one of means-result. This is the normal usage of ἐν τούτῳ, and in the following examples I shall not repeat this comment. As already mentioned, the purpose for using the phrase ἐν τούτῳ to anticipate the means clause is to put emphasis on the means clause over and above the result clause (see Longacre 1983:3).

1 John 2:5b-6 This is how [ἐν τούτῳ] we know that we belong to him: The one who claims to remain in him, he also has to walk as Jesus did.

The means for knowing is, in this case, not a clause but a sentence with two clauses. Although it does not contain the word ”if,” the sentence is formulated as a condition: If we who claim to belong to God live as Jesus did, then we can know that we truly belong to him. The point is essentially the same as the point in v. 5a, and it may, in some languages, be easier to translate this case as anaphoric. The meaning is not altered since it is a sandwich case.

1 John 3:10 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] is it made clear who are the children of God and who are the children of the Devil: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

This is very similar to the previous case. How can we know whether a person is a true follower of God or not? By applying a certain test rule.

1 John 3:16 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] we have come to know what (true) love is, (namely) that Jesus laid down his life for us.

1 John 3:24 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] we know that he remains in us, (namely) from the Spirit which he gave us.

In 3:24, the means (or basis, if you like) for the result of knowing is not a full clause, but only a prepositional noun phrase with an embedded relative clause.

1 John 4:2-3 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] you may know (recognize) the Spirit of God: Every spirit who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being is from God, but every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus (in that way) is not from God.

1 John 4:9 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] was God's love shown to (ἐν) us, (namely) that God sent his one and only Son into the world, so that we might receive life through him.

The first sentence of 4:9 has been translated in various ways. The main problem is whether the preposition ἐν should be taken in the sense of 'in/among/to' and connected with the verb 'having been made clear/having been shown'–with this particular verb the meaning 'to' is well attested (cf. 2 Cor 5:11) –or whether ἐν should be taken in the sense of 'towards/for', which is necessary if it is connected with the word 'love'–this sense is clearly attested in 1 John 4:16. Because of the parallelism with 1 John 3:10 and the immediate context of the surrounding verses, I prefer to follow RSV and, in particular, NEB over and against most other translations. However, both interpretations are possible and the choice is difficult. (NIV has tried to keep the ambiguity.)

1 John 4:10 The (true) love consists in this [ἐν τούτῳ], (namely) not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and…

This instance does not show the means-result relationship. Rather, it is the more normal use of a cataphoric demonstrative in a sentence with the verb to be. The concept of love is described by a whole clause which is anticipated by the demonstrative.

1 John 4:13 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] we know that we remain in him and he remains in us, (namely) that he has given us (and we have) his Spirit.

The means clause in 4:13 is introduced with a ὅτι, which can be translated either as 'that' or 'because'. The meaning is essentially the same.

1 John 4:17 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] has the love been perfected among us, that [ἵνα] we may have confidence on the day of judgment, that/because [ὅτι] as Jesus is (lived) so should we be (live) in this world.

This sentence is complex with several possible interpretations. One problem is that ἵνα has three usages: It may introduce either a content clause, a purpose clause, or a result clause. The other problem is that ὅτι has at least two usages: it may introduce a content clause or a reason clause. In the cases where ἐν τούτῳ is connected with a content clause showing the reason or means for the main clause, the content clause is normally introduced with ὅτι. Once ἵνα is used and sometimes other constructions are used. This would favor the interpretation that the ὅτι clause here is the means by which love is perfected. The content of the ἵνα clause also makes it difficult to imagine that this clause could express the means by which love is perfected. Instead, the ἵνα clause is best taken as the result stemming from the main clause; that is, perfected love results in confidence on the day of judgment.

This interpretation is further supported by having a look at how John uses the word translated 'to perfect' or 'to reach its goal'. Four times this word occurs in 1 John and every time together with 'love'.

In 1 John 2:5 he says, ”If anyone keeps his word, truly, in him has the love of God been made perfect.” In 1 John 4:12 he says, ”If we love each other, then his love is made perfect in us.” Now, to ”keep his word,” to ”love one another” and to ”live as Jesus lived” is practically the same thing since the new commandment which Jesus gave us is that ”we should love one another as he has loved us.” The three passages (2:5, 4:12, and 4:17) then concur with one another in giving obedience to the love command as a means for the perfection of God’s love in us. The fourth occurrence of ”perfection” together with ”love” is in 4:18, the verse immediately following the verse under discussion. It says that ”perfect love drives away fear, since fear has to do with punishment.” This is what is alluded to by the ἵνα clause of 4:17. When love has been perfected (that is, when God’s love for us has reached its goal), then we don’t need to fear punishment but can have confidence on the day of judgment. The result of perfect love is freedom from fear of punishment.

Assuming that this interpretation is correct, we might paraphrase as follows: If we live in this world in the same way as Jesus did, then God’s love has reached its goal for us and we can have confidence/peace on the day of judgment.

1 John 5:2 By this [ἐν τούτῳ] we know that we love the children of God, (namely) when we love God and do his commandment.

Finally, let me make the comment that it is amazing how often the phrase ἐν τούτῳ is used in a clause where the main verb expresses the concept of knowledge or realization. The verses marked by ἐν τούτῳ are at the very center of John’s theme. He wants to oppose certain false teachers who did not accept that Christ had fully become a person like us at his birth and that he remained a human person till his death. John wants not only to correct such false teaching but also to make sure that his readers fully understand what it means to be one with Christ–to belong to him, to be a true follower of Jesus–and how we can be sure that we are indeed on the right track.

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