

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 2B – Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide Questions, 4) FAQs

Abstract:

This excerpt from a **teaching session on the Johannine Epistles by Dr. Robert Yarbrough** examines **key theological themes** found in the books of 1, 2, and 3 John. Dr. Yarbrough focuses on **frequently occurring words** like God, love, knowing, abiding, world, Son, sin, hearing, commandment, and Father, discussing their significance within these letters. He presents the **message of each theme for both "faithful dying" believers facing persecution and "lax" individuals** with a less committed faith. The lecture emphasizes the **importance of abiding in Christ's teaching, the temporary nature of the world, the assurance of eternal life through the Son, the forgiveness of sins, and the confidence of being heard by God** through prayer, contrasting these truths with a passive or worldly-focused faith.

Briefing Document: Here is a detailed briefing document reviewing the main themes and most important ideas or facts from the provided excerpts of Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture on the Johannine Epistles:

BRIEFING DOCUMENT: THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN 1, 2, AND 3 JOHN (ACCORDING TO DR. ROBERT YARBROUGH)

Source: Excerpts from Dr. Robert Yarbrough, "The Johannine Epistles, Session 2B – Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John"

Overview:

Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture focuses on balancing life in Christ as presented in the Johannine Epistles (1, 2, and 3 John). This session specifically delves into the major theological themes found in these letters, identifying key terms based on their frequency of occurrence. Yarbrough presents the message of these themes from two perspectives: for "the faithful dying" (those facing persecution and suffering) and for "the lax" (those who are complacent or departing from core Christian teaching). The lecture emphasizes the enduring relevance of John's message for both groups.

Key Themes and Ideas:

Yarbrough identifies the most frequently occurring words in the Johannine Epistles as indicative of the major theological themes:

1. **God:** The most frequent word. While God is a transcendent and spiritual being beyond full human comprehension, the message for the faithful dying is that through the Word, we are cleansed and united with God. For the lax, departing from the teaching of Christ, especially the doctrine of Christ, indicates a lack of a saving relationship with God.
2. **Love (agape):** The second most frequent word.
 - **For the faithful dying:** God's love is a place of refuge. His love, when perfected in believers, lifts them above the fear of judgment. This assurance of salvation is a source of comfort in the face of potential death and suffering. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 4:17-18: "By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." The testimonies of persecuted Christians often reflect this sense of God's presence and love amidst trauma.
 - **For the lax:** Compromising one's soul occurs when love is directed more towards the world than the Father who sent the Son. This is an echo of the first commandment. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." While God loved the world, John's warning is against placing ultimate affection on the world to the detriment of one's relationship with God.
1. **Knowing (ginosko):** The third most frequent word, generally referring to experiential knowledge. This theme was covered in a previous session but is reiterated as a major theme.
2. **Remaining/Abiding (meno):** Occurs two dozen times in 1 John and three times in 2 John.
 - **For the faithful dying:** God's Word saves us from the start and imparts His living presence. This enduring presence keeps believers close to the Son and the Father, providing assurance in difficult circumstances. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 2:24: "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you... If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father."

- **For the lax:** A departure from the clear teaching of Scripture and Christ indicates a lack of a saving relationship with God. Abiding in God's Word is a challenge against the natural inclination towards complacency. Yarbrough quotes 2 John 9: "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." Abiding signifies sticking with the foundational truth of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and developing a life and relationship with Him.

1. **World (kosmos):** Occurs 23 times in 1 John.

- **For the faithful dying:** The world, while appearing permanent and imposing, is passing away. Those who honor God's will will find life in His presence. The world hates those whose aim is God's will. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 2:17: "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." He also quotes 1 John 3:13: "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." This antagonism should be expected.
- **For the lax:** The world is full of religious substitutes and misrepresentations that are given a hearing. Believers are warned to test the spirits. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world." He further adds from 1 John 4:5: "They, these people of non-biblical convictions, are from the world. Therefore, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them." True believers listen to God's word and are moved into a relationship with God, essentially living in the "kingdom of God" world alongside the physical world.

1. **Son:** Occurs 22 times, always referring to Jesus.

- **For the faithful dying:** Believing in the Son carries the assurance of eternal life, both in the future and as a transformed quality of life in the present. The Son is the true God and eternal life. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 5:11-13: "This is the testimony or the witness that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." He also references 1 John 5:20: "He is the true God and eternal life." The Son is the source of life and connection with God, providing hope in the face of death.
- **For the lax:** Saving faith is not merely passive assent to ideas, compliance with a moral code, or comparing oneself favorably to others. It is not rejection, indifference, or hostility to Jesus as the manifestation of God. To deny the Son is to deny the Father. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 2:22-23: "Who is the liar but he who

denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also." He shares a personal anecdote about a man who claimed healing power but denied the atoning work of the Son, highlighting that genuine faith involves confessing Jesus in His fullness, including His death for sins.

1. **Sin:** Occurs 17 times in 1 John.

- **For the faithful dying:** Believers face death with hope because they know the forgiveness of their sins through the Son's propitiation (satisfaction of God's wrath). Fellowship with other believers also provides strength in suffering. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 1:7: "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." He emphasizes from 1 John 4:10: "In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us. And sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The forgiveness of sins through Jesus' sacrifice is the basis for hope.
- **For the lax:** Some knowingly commit sin, assuming endless forgiveness. However, Jesus appeared to reduce sin, not encourage it. Making a *practice* of sinning is practicing lawlessness (anomia), which is dedicated rebellion against God. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 3:4-5: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness... He appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." He warns against the "game of chicken" of habitually sinning while assuming God's continued forgiveness based on mere intellectual belief.

1. **Knowing (oida):** The ninth most frequent word, referring to clear conception and conviction.

- **For the faithful dying:** The Christian hope is the return of the Lord, when believers will see Him in His glory and be made like Him. This confident expectation provides support during trials. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know he doesn't use the early word *ginosko*, which is more experiential, because you can't know it until it happens. But *oida*, you can have the clear conception and conviction that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." This is a conviction about a future reality that sustains believers.
- **For the lax:** A sign of Christ's presence is fervent, self-sacrificial love for others (the "brothers"). Absence of this love indicates that a person has not found life in Christ and "abides in death." Yarbrough quotes 1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers... Whoever does not love abides

in death." This knowing comes from observing the principle and reality of God's love evident in believers' lives, particularly over time.

1. **Hearing:** The verb "I hear" occurs 14 times.

- **For the faithful dying:** God hears when His people cry out to Him. Praying according to His will ensures that He hears and will act according to what is best, wisest, and most loving. This gives confidence in times of danger and need. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 5:14-15: "this is the confidence we have towards him if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Now, God hears everything, but this is the word, or this is the truth, that God hears us, and he's going to implement what's best, wisest, and most loving according to his might and purpose. If we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have requests that we have asked of him." The key is praying in alignment with God's will.
- **For the lax:** Love for God and obedience to His commandments are intertwined, not opposed. Lowering ethical standards while claiming love for God is a mistake; a loving God is zealous for His people to follow His will. Yarbrough quotes 2 John 6: "this is love that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it."

1. **Commandment:** Occurs 14 times.

- **For the faithful dying:** Faithfulness to God's commandments (believing in Christ and loving others) can lead to persecution, but in this obedience and love, God abides in believers and they in Him, confirmed by the Holy Spirit. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 3:23-24: "This is the commandment that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him, and by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us."
- **For the lax:** True faith in Christ produces a desire to learn and do His commands because they are a sign of His love and are not burdensome for those with genuine faith. If commandments are burdensome, it may indicate weak or lacking faith. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 2:4: "whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." He also quotes 1 John 5:3: "this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome." Indifference to God's commandments is a warning sign for the lax.

1. **Father (pater):** Occurs 14 times, primarily referring to God the Father.

- **For the faithful dying:** The magnificent love of the Father made believers His children through Christ's sacrifice, providing steadfastness and assurance of divine protection. Understanding this love also explains their alienation from the world, as the world is alienated from the Father. Yarbrough quotes 1 John 3:1: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, John writes, that we should be called children of God, and so we are. This is a statement of amazement and astonishment that the great love of the Father should be bestowed on us, not just in terms of benefits, but in terms of a personal union so that we become part of his family, we become his children. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."
- **For the lax:** The love of the Father is the antithesis of love for the world. To have the Father requires confessing the Son as Lord over the world and as a saving treasure. Loving the world too much cuts one off from the Father's love. Yarbrough repeats the quotes from 1 John 2:15-16: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and a pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world."

Conclusion:

Dr. Yarbrough concludes by emphasizing the relevance of these theological themes for both "dying churches" (those facing external pressure and suffering) and "lax" Christians (those who are complacent or drifting from core truths). The message of the Johannine Epistles offers direction, assurance, and the presence of God for the faithful and conviction and a call to return to trusting in God for the lax. The frequency of these terms highlights their central importance in John's address to the early church, providing timeless guidance for believers.

Study Guide Questions:

Study Guide: Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John

I. Key Theological Themes (Most Frequent Words)

- **God:** The most frequent word in the Johannine Epistles. John's letters emphasize God's nature, love, and relationship with believers.
- *For the faithful dying:* God's Word saves and provides an enduring presence, uniting believers with the Father and Son. This offers hope during persecution.
- *For the lax:* Departures from Christ's teaching indicate a lack of saving relationship with God. Abiding in the teaching of Christ is central.

- **Love (agape):** Second most frequent word.
- *For the faithful dying:* God's love is a refuge, casting out fear of judgment as it is perfected in believers. This love sustains faith during suffering and persecution.
- *For the lax:* Loving the world or things in the world more than the Father indicates a lack of the Father's love. Love for God and obedience to His commandments are interrelated, not antithetical.
- **Knowing (ginosko - experiential):** Third most frequent word. This refers to an experiential knowledge of God and Christ.
- **Remain/Abide (meno):** Fourth most frequent word. This signifies an enduring connection with God and His Word.
- *For the faithful dying:* Abiding in what was heard from the beginning (God's Word) unites believers with the Son and the Father, providing assurance during persecution.
- *For the lax:* Failing to abide in the teaching of Christ means not having God, regardless of claims. Abiding in God's Word is a constant challenge against natural inclination towards laxity.
- **World (kosmos):** Fifth most frequent word. Refers to the created order, often in opposition to God and His people.
- *For the faithful dying:* The world seems permanent and imposing, especially during persecution, but it is passing away. Those who honor God's will find life in His presence and should expect the world's antagonism.
- *For the lax:* The world is full of religious substitutes and misrepresentations that find a hearing. Believers must test the spirits to see if they are from God.

II. Other Significant Theological Concepts/Words

- **Son:** Refers specifically to Jesus.
- *For the faithful dying:* Believing in the Son assures eternal life because He is the true God and eternal life. This eternal life is both eschatological and realized in the present.
- *For the lax:* Saving faith is not passive assent or mere morality, but involves accepting Jesus as the defining manifestation of God. Denying the Son is denying the Father. Confessing the Son is necessary to have the Father.

- **Sin:**
 - *For the faithful dying:* Believers face death with hope because they know the forgiveness of sins through Christ's propitiation (paying the penalty). Fellowship with other believers also provides strength in suffering.
 - *For the lax:* Knowingly and habitually practicing sin (anomia - lawlessness) indicates rebellion against God and is a dangerous game of assuming endless leniency. Jesus came to reduce sin, not encourage it.
- **Knowing (oida - conceptual/conviction):** Refers to a clear understanding or conviction about theological truths.
 - *For the faithful dying:* The Christian hope is the return of Christ, and the conviction that we will see Him as He is and be like Him sustains believers in testing.
 - *For the lax:* A sign of Christ's presence is fervent love for others. Absence of this love indicates a person has not found life in Christ and abides in death.
- **Hearing:** Refers to God listening to the prayers of His people.
 - *For the faithful dying:* Believers have confidence that God hears their prayers according to His will, implementing what is best. Persevering in prayer is key.
 - *For the lax:* Love for God is shown through obedience to His commandments. Lowering ethical standards based on the assumption of a loving God's leniency is a mistake.
- **Commandment:** Refers to God's instructions for His people.
 - *For the faithful dying:* Faithfulness to commandments (believing in Jesus and loving one another) can lead to persecution, but it assures believers of God's presence through the Spirit.
 - *For the lax:* Faith in Christ produces a desire to learn and do what He commands because they are not burdensome but a sign of His love. Indifference to commandments is a sign of weak or lacking faith.
- **Father (pater):** Refers to God the Father.
 - *For the faithful dying:* The Father's magnificent love made believers His children, providing steadfastness and assurance of protection. Alienation from the world is expected because the world is alienated from the Father.

- *For the lax*: Love for the Father is the antithesis of love for the world. To love the world too much cuts one off from the Father's love. Confessing the Son as Lord and treasure indicates having the Father.

III. Balancing Life in Christ

- John's letters address both the faithful who are facing persecution and potentially "dying" for their faith, and those who are "lax" or have a "bloodless religion" lacking commitment.
- The theological themes discussed provide messages of hope and assurance for the faithful and warnings and calls to repentance for the lax.
- The letters emphasize the interconnectedness of core beliefs: faith in the Son, love for God and others, obedience to commandments, and abiding in God's Word are all signs of a genuine relationship with God.

Quiz

1. According to the source, what are the three most frequently occurring words in John's letters, and what do they represent thematically?
2. How does the concept of "abiding" relate to the faithful dying in John's letters?
3. What is John's message regarding the "world" for those who are facing persecution?
4. In what two ways is eternal life presented in John's writings, according to the source?
5. What does the source say about saving faith in contrast to passive assent or moral compliance?
6. What does the word "propitiation" mean in the context of Christ's sacrifice for sins, as described in the source?
7. What is the difference between the words "ginosko" and "oida" when translated as "knowing" in John's letters?
8. How does the source connect love for God and obedience to His commandments for those who are considered "lax"?
9. What is the significance of God hearing the prayers of the faithful dying, according to the source?
10. What is the message regarding the "Father" for the faithful dying, and how does it explain their potential alienation from the world?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The three most frequent words are God, love (verb), and knowing (experiential verb). They represent themes related to God's nature, His love, and the believer's relationship with Him through knowledge and experience.
2. For the faithful dying, abiding in God's Word, which they heard from the beginning, means they remain united with the Son and the Father. This enduring presence provides hope and assurance during persecution.
3. For those facing persecution, John's message is that although the world seems permanent and imposing, it is passing away. They should expect antagonism from the world because their focus is on God's will rather than human aspirations, but God will repay both their faithfulness and the world's opposition.
4. Eternal life is presented as both eschatological (relating to the future and the end) and realized (transforming the quality of life in the present).
5. Saving faith is not merely passive agreement with religious ideas or compliance with a moral code. It involves accepting Jesus as the defining manifestation of God and is contrasted with indifference or hostility towards Him.
6. Propitiation means that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. It signifies that God's wrath against sin was satisfied by Christ's sacrifice, resulting in forgiveness for believers.
7. "Ginosko" refers to knowing in an experiential way, while "oida" refers to knowing based on clear conception or conviction about a truth, even if it hasn't been experienced yet.
8. For the lax, love for God and obedience to His commandments are interrelated and not opposed. Lowering ethical standards while claiming love for God is a mistake, as God is zealous for His people to comply with His will.
9. For the faithful dying, knowing that God hears their prayers brings confidence. It means that God takes their requests into consideration and will implement what is best, wisest, and most loving according to His will and purpose, even in times of danger and need.
10. For the faithful dying, the Father's magnificent love has made them His children, giving them steadfastness and assurance of divine protection. Their alienation from the world is expected because the world itself is alienated from the Father, and the world does not understand or know those who have a relationship with Him.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss how Robert Yarbrough's analysis of the key theological themes in 1, 2, and 3 John (God, love, knowing, abiding, world) provides a framework for understanding the balance of life in Christ for both the faithful dying and the lax.
2. Analyze the contrasting messages for the "faithful dying" and the "lax" concerning the concepts of the "Son" and "sin." How do these contrasts highlight the essential nature of saving faith and its implications for behavior?
3. Explore the interconnectedness of "love," "commandment," and "hearing" in the Johannine Epistles as presented in the source. How does a proper understanding of these themes counter the tendencies of a "bloodless religion"?
4. According to the source, how does the Father's love provide both assurance for the faithful dying and a contrast to love for the world for the lax?
5. Evaluate the significance of the concept of "abiding" in the teaching of Christ as a central challenge for the lax, and how this contrasts with its role as a source of assurance for the faithful dying.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Agape:** The Greek word for love used frequently in the Johannine Epistles, often referring to God's characteristic attribute and the love believers are called to demonstrate.
- **Anomia:** The Greek word for "lawlessness" used in 1 John 3:4, referring to a practice of sinning that indicates dedicated rebellion against God.
- **Abide (meno):** To remain or dwell; in the context of John's letters, it refers to an enduring spiritual connection with God, Christ, and His Word.
- **Balancing Life in Christ:** The overarching theme of Yarbrough's teaching sessions on the Johannine Epistles, addressing the challenges faced by both committed believers (faithful dying) and those with superficial faith (the lax).
- **Commandment:** Refers to God's instructions and will for His people, emphasizing obedience as a sign of love and faith.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times or the future fulfillment of God's plans.
- **Faithful Dying:** A term used in the source to describe believers who are committed to their faith and may face persecution or death as a result.

- **Father (pater):** A term referring to God the Father, emphasizing His loving relationship with believers who become His children through Christ.
- **Ginosko:** A Greek word for "knowing" that emphasizes experiential or relational knowledge.
- **Hearing:** In the context of prayer, it refers to God listening to and taking into consideration the requests of His people according to His will.
- **Kosmos:** The Greek word for "world" or the created order, often presented in opposition to God and His purposes.
- **Lax:** A term used in the source to describe individuals who claim to be Christians but lack deep commitment, having a superficial or "bloodless religion."
- **Oida:** A Greek word for "knowing" that emphasizes conceptual understanding or clear conviction about a truth.
- **Propitiation:** The act of satisfying God's wrath against sin through a sacrifice; in the context of John's letters, it refers to Christ's atoning death on the cross.
- **Realized (eschatology):** The idea that the benefits or aspects of the end times are already experienced in the present. In this context, eternal life is not just a future hope but a present reality for believers.
- **Son:** Refers specifically to Jesus Christ, emphasizing His divine identity and relationship with God the Father.
- **Test the Spirits:** A command in 1 John 4:1 to discern whether religious impulses, convictions, or teachings originate from God or from false prophets and spirits of the world.
- **Theological Themes:** Major concepts or ideas explored within a theological text, identified by the frequency and significance of key words.
- **World (of the kingdom of God):** A concept contrasting with the earthly "world," representing the spiritual realm and reality where believers live in relationship with God.

FAQs: What are the most frequent theological themes in 1, 2, and 3 John?

Dr. Robert Yarbrough identifies the most frequent theological themes in the Johannine Epistles based on word frequency. The most frequent is "God," followed by the verb "love"

(agape), and then the verb for "knowing" (ginosko) in an experiential way. These foundational concepts are central to John's message.

What is the significance of the word "abide" (meno) in John's letters?

"Abide" is the fourth most frequent word and holds significant meaning for both the faithful and the lax. For the faithful, abiding in God's Word, which saves us, imparts His living presence and keeps us close to the Father and Son, offering hope in times of persecution. For the lax, not abiding in the teaching of Christ indicates a lack of a saving relationship with God. Abiding signifies remaining firmly rooted in the initial faith in Jesus Christ and developing that relationship.

How does John address the concept of "the world" (kosmos) for believers facing persecution and those who are lax?

For the faithful facing persecution, John acknowledges that the world can seem imposing and permanent, bringing suffering and opposition. However, he emphasizes that the world is passing away, while those who honor God's will will find life in His unchanging presence. Antagonism from the world is to be expected because the world hates those whose highest aim is God's will. For the lax, John warns against religious substitutes and misrepresentations prevalent in the world, urging believers to test the spirits and not to love the world or the things in it in a way that rivals their affection for God. The world speaks from the world, and the world listens to them, highlighting the conflicting nature of these two realms.

What is the message associated with the term "Son" in John's letters, particularly for the faithful and the lax?

The term "Son," referring to Jesus Christ, is a major word in John's letters. For the faithful facing potential death, believing in the Son carries the assurance of eternal life, which is not only future but also a transformed quality of life experienced in the present. The Son is presented as the true God and eternal life itself, connecting believers with God. For the lax, saving faith is not merely passive assent, moral compliance, or comparing oneself favorably to others. It is rooted in confessing the Son; rejecting or being indifferent or hostile to Jesus as a defining manifestation of God the Father is seen as denying God and the Father.

How does John connect God's love with overcoming fear of judgment for the faithful?

John emphasizes that God's love is a refuge for the faithful. Knowing and believing the love that God has for us, which is perfected in us as we abide in Him, lifts us above the fear of judgment. Perfect love casts out fear because fear has to do with punishment. This

assurance of God's love provides confidence for the day of judgment and is particularly significant for those facing suffering or death, as it assures them that persecution is not necessarily God's judgment.

What is the message regarding "sin" for the faithful and the lax in 1 John?

For the faithful facing death, the message is one of hope because they know the forgiveness of their sins through the sacrifice of the Son, who is the propitiation for our sins (He bore the punishment). Fellowship with other believers in Christ also provides strength in suffering. For the lax, John addresses the danger of knowingly committing sin, assuming endless forgiveness. He clarifies that Jesus appeared to reduce sin, not encourage it. Practicing sin can be seen as lawlessness (anomia), a dedicated rebellion against God, which is a dangerous game to play with God's grace.

How does John distinguish between different kinds of "knowing" and its implications for believers?

John uses different Greek words for "knowing." The more frequent word (ginosko) refers to experiential knowing, such as passing from death to life because we love the brothers. The less frequent word (oida) refers to a clear conception or conviction, like the certainty that when Christ appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. This confident expectation of Christ's return upholds believers in times of testing and loss. For the lax, the absence of fervent, self-sacrificial love for others is a sign that they have not truly passed out of death into life and therefore do not have this experiential knowledge of God.

What is the relationship between love for God and obedience to His commandments in John's letters, and what does this mean for the lax?

Love for God and obedience to His commandments are presented as interrelated, not antithetical. John states that "this is love, that we walk according to his commandments." While faithfulness to commandments can lead to hardship, it is a sign of abiding in God and God in us. For the lax, John warns against lowering ethical standards based on the idea of a loving God being lenient. True faith in Christ produces an appetite for learning and doing what He commands, and these commandments are not burdensome for those with genuine faith. Indifference to God's commandments indicates weak or lacking faith.