

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 6, 1 John Full Scale Faith, Section 2 [2:7-17 Central Commandment], Section 3 [2:18-3:8] Key Counsel

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

Abstract:

This academic text from Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture series, "Balancing Life in Christ," focuses on **1 John**, specifically chapters 2:7 through 3:8. The lecture explores the **central commandment** of love, highlighting that it is both an old and new message with profound implications for believers' lives. It then transitions to a **key counsel** urging believers to **remain in their anointing**, which Yarbrough interprets as the abiding **word of the gospel** that guides and empowers them. The text emphasizes the **transformative power of the gospel**, leading to forgiveness of sins, knowing God, overcoming evil, and ultimately, freedom from the practice of sin through **abiding in Christ**.

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: Dr. Robert Yarbrough on 1 John 2:7-3:8

Source: Excerpts from "Yarbrough_JohannineEp06_English.pdf" - Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 6, 1 John Full Scale Faith, Sections 2 [2:7-17] and 3 [2:18-3:8].

Date: October 26, 2023

Subject: Review of key themes and counsel in 1 John 2:7-3:8, focusing on the "Central Commandment" and "Key Counsel" sections of Dr. Yarbrough's lecture.

Executive Summary:

Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture on 1 John 2:7-3:8 explores the interconnectedness of Christian faith, behavior, and relationship with God. This section of 1 John, divided by Yarbrough into the "Central Commandment" (2:7-17) and "Key Counsel" (2:18-3:8), emphasizes the enduring yet new nature of the commandment to love one another, the reality of a spiritual crisis marked by division and false teaching, and the call to abide in Christ through the "anointing" of the gospel message, which empowers believers to overcome sin and have confidence in the future. A key takeaway is that true faith is evidenced by love for others, obedience to God's commands, and a growing relationship with Him, leading to a balanced life in Christ.

Main Themes and Key Ideas/Facts:

Section 2 [2:7-17]: Central Commandment: Embodying the Age-Old Message

- **The Interplay of Faith, Works, and Relationship:** Yarbrough begins by reiterating the previous lecture's point about how the gospel word leads to faith, which in turn changes behavior (obeying God's commands) and transforms relational life (personal relationship with God). This growth in faith, obedience, and love for God constitutes the "balanced life."
- **God is Light, Not Darkness:** The core message of 1 John, introduced earlier in the epistle, is that God is light and has no darkness. This foundational truth is presented in contrast to the situations of darkness John is addressing in the churches.
- **The "Central Commandment" - Love One Another:** John's message in this section is centered on the commandment to love one another.
- **Old and New:** This commandment is described as both "no new commandment, but an old commandment" (2:7) and "a new commandment" (2:8). It is "old" because it has roots in the Old Testament and was explicitly taught and lived by Jesus (love the Lord your God and love your neighbor). It is "new" in that it is "true in him and in you" (2:8) because of the progression of redemption and the coming of Christ.
- **Light vs. Darkness:** Love for fellow believers is presented as the evidence of being "in the light," while hatred of one's brother is a sign of being "in darkness." Yarbrough emphasizes that this contrast is absolute: it is either love or hate, as inaction or indifference when one could help constitutes a form of hate from a Christian perspective. He illustrates this with the example of helping a neighbor with a fallen tree.

- **Talk vs. Living:** John echoes earlier themes by highlighting the disconnect between claiming to be "in the light" while not loving one's brother. This foreshadows the problems of division and lack of love he will address later.
- **Two Ways:** The gospel message presents a clear choice: abiding "in the light" through love for others, or being "in the darkness" due to hate, which blinds and leads astray.
- **Pastoral Appeal (2:12-14):** John addresses his readers at different stages of spiritual maturity ("little children," "fathers," "young men").
- **Commendation:** He commends them for traits necessary to embody the message of love, such as having their sins forgiven, knowing God, having overcome the evil one, being strong, and having the word of God abide in them. These are presented as character traits that enable effective and integrated Christian living.
- **Pre-Command (2:15-17) - Do Not Love the World:** John issues a crucial warning against loving the world, which he views as a rival to loving God.
- **Toxic Love:** Loving the world "to the wrong extent and in the wrong way" is toxic because it displaces the desire for God with focus on "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (2:16).
- **Vainglory of Bios:** "Pride of life" (or "vainglory of the material life" - *bios*) refers to the pursuit of everyday earthly pleasures and accomplishments as ultimate goals. Yarbrough notes that while the human enterprise has its glories, prioritizing *bios* above God leads to emptiness, especially in the face of difficulties or aging.
- **Passing Away vs. Abiding Forever:** The world and its desires are "passing away," and laboring for the world's sake has no lasting future. Conversely, "the one who does the will of God abides forever" (2:17), signifying the enduring quality and benefit of aligning one's life with God's purposes.

Section 3 [2:18-3:8]: Key Counsel: Remain in His Anointing

- **The Last Hour and the Antichrists (2:18-20):** John identifies the current time as "the last hour" because "many antichrists have come." This signals an era of crisis and impending judgment.
- **Church Division:** The emergence of these "antichrists" is linked to a "church split" – individuals who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (2:19). Their departure reveals that they were not truly part of the community of faith.

- **Failure to Abide:** The crisis involves people "not abiding" and "opposing the apostolic message."
- **The Truth That Abides (2:21-25):** In contrast to the deceivers, John addresses those who have remained faithful.
- **Anointing and Knowledge:** Those who stayed "have been anointed by the Holy One" and "have knowledge" (2:20). Yarbrough suggests the "anointing" is primarily the *gospel message* or the *word of God*, which *conveys* the Holy Spirit. It is a substance, not just an intuition, and it teaches believers truth.
- **True Indicatives:** The core truth is "that Jesus is the Christ" (2:22). Denying this Christological truth is a manifestation of the "antichrist" spirit. Confessing the Son is essential to having the Father.
- **Logical Imperative:** The truth of Christ leads to the imperative: "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you" (2:24). Staying rooted in the original apostolic teaching is crucial.
- **Motivation: Eternal Life:** Abiding in the original truth leads to abiding "in the Son and in the Father," and the promise associated with this is "eternal life" (2:25).
- **The Imperative to Abide (2:26-29):** John directly commands his readers to "abide in him" (2:27, 28).
- **Power of the Anointing:** The anointing (the truth of the gospel ministered by the Holy Spirit) empowers believers, teaching them and liberating them from needing constant external guidance. It is true and not a lie.
- **Benefit and Mark of Abiding:** Abiding results in "confidence and not shrink[ing] from him in shame at his coming" (2:28). Readiness for Christ's return is a key benefit. The "mark" of abiding is the "pursuit of godliness," or practicing righteousness.
- **The Glory of Abiding (3:1-8):** This section highlights the incredible status and future of those who abide.
- **Status as Children of God:** Abiding believers have received the immense love of the Father and are called "children of God" (3:1).
- **Hope and Response:** The hope of believers is in Christ's appearing, knowing "we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is" (3:2). This hope motivates a response of purifying oneself as He is pure.

- **Fruit of Abiding: Freedom from Sin:** A central theme is the relationship between abiding and sin. John states, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning" (3:6).
- **Sin is Lawlessness:** "Sin is lawlessness" (3:4). Christ appeared to "take away sins" and "destroy the works of the devil" (3:5, 8).
- **Meaning of "Not Sinning":** Yarbrough discusses the translation of the present tense "sinning" (or "makes a practice of sinning"). He suggests that John is referring to a fundamental devotion away from God – being a heretic, antinomian (disobeying God's commands), or hard-hearted (not loving God). This kind of sin demonstrates that one is not truly born of God, in contrast to the daily struggles and occasional sins that believers confess and repent of (the "sin not unto death" mentioned elsewhere).
- **Exhibit Qualities of a Child of God:** If one is truly born of God, they will exhibit the qualities of believing God's teaching, obeying His commands, and having a personal relationship with and love for God. Abiding leads to an increasing minimization of the presence and effect of sin.

Conclusion:

Dr. Yarbrough's analysis of 1 John 2:7-3:8 reveals a robust call to live a balanced Christian life rooted in the ancient yet ever-new commandment to love. This love is not passive but active and sacrificial, reflecting God's character. The section addresses the reality of spiritual conflict and false teaching, emphasizing the need to remain anchored in the truth of who Jesus is as the Christ. Abiding in this truth, conveyed through the gospel message (the "anointing"), empowers believers to overcome sin, grow in righteousness, and live with confidence in their identity as children of God and their future with Him. The message is a powerful affirmation of the transformative power of the gospel and a stark warning against straying from its core tenets and the life of love and obedience it demands.

Study Guide:

Study Guide: Balancing Life in Christ (1 John 2:7-3:8)

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. According to Dr. Yarbrough, what are the three aspects of the "balanced life in Christ" that the word of God helps believers grow in?
2. John describes the "central commandment" as both "old" and "new." In what sense is it old, and in what sense is it new according to the lecture?

3. Dr. Yarbrough suggests that for John, the opposite of loving your neighbor is not necessarily active hatred. What alternative is suggested as a form of "hating" one's neighbor?
4. John uses the terms "little children," "fathers," and "young men" in his pastoral appeal (1 John 2:12-14). According to the lecture, what do these terms represent?
5. What is the "pre-command" that John gives in 1 John 2:15-16, and what is its significance in relation to loving God?
6. According to the lecture, what are the three aspects of "all that is in the world" that are "not from the Father, but is from the world"?
7. What is the significance of the word "bios" as used in "pride of life" (vainglory of the material life) according to Dr. Yarbrough?
8. In 1 John 2:18, John states, "it's the last hour." What events does he refer to immediately after this statement that indicate this is the "last hour"?
9. According to the lecture, what does Dr. Yarbrough believe the "anointing" referred to in 1 John 2:20 and 2:27 primarily represents?
10. John speaks strongly against "practicing sin" in this section (1 John 3:4-8). How does Dr. Yarbrough interpret this, considering John also acknowledges that believers do sin?

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the tension between the "old" and "new" nature of the commandment to love one another as presented in 1 John 2:7-11. How does Dr. Yarbrough connect this to the progress of redemption and the coming of Christ?
2. Analyze John's pastoral appeal to "little children," "fathers," and "young men" (1 John 2:12-14). What specific character traits and spiritual grounding does he commend in each group, and how do these traits enable believers to "embody the message"?
3. Explain the significance of John's warning against loving "the world" (1 John 2:15-17). What does Dr. Yarbrough mean by the concept of the "expulsive" nature of the love of God, and how does this relate to the things in the world that John warns against?
4. Examine John's teaching on the "last hour" and the presence of "Antichrists" (1 John 2:18-23). How does this context inform the imperative to "abide" in the truth that was heard from the beginning, and what is the consequence of denying the nature of Christ?

5. Discuss the concept of the "anointing" (1 John 2:20, 27) and the call to "abide" in it. According to Dr. Yarbrough, what is the source and function of this anointing, and what are the benefits and marks of abiding in it?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Balanced Life in Christ:** A life where believers grow in faith in Christ through the gospel word, which transforms their behavior to obey God's commands and their relationships to have a personal connection with God.
- **Central Burden (of 1 John):** About God, His character (light), and His activity, summarized by the statement "God is light and in him there is absolutely no darkness."
- **Central Commandment:** The message to love one another, which is both an old commandment from the Old Testament and Jesus' teaching, and a new commandment that is true in a new sense because of Christ's work and presence in believers.
- **Age-Old Message:** Refers to the commandment to love one another, which has roots in the Old Testament and was explicitly taught and lived out by Jesus.
- **Pastoral Appeal:** John's address to his readers (little children, fathers, young men) commending their spiritual maturity and grounding in necessary character traits.
- **Commendation:** Positive things John says about his readers, highlighting traits necessary to embody the message effectively (e.g., sins forgiven, knowing God, overcoming the evil one).
- **Pre-command:** The instruction "Do not love the world" (1 John 2:15), which sets the stage for the primary commands to love God and neighbor by identifying a rival affection.
- **The World:** Refers to the things in the world (desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, pride of life) that are not from God and rival the love of God.
- **Pride of Life (Vainglory of the Material Life):** The pursuit of temporary validation and satisfaction from the material aspects of everyday living (bios), rather than focusing on eternal life (zoe).
- **Last Hour:** The era characterized by the coming of Antichrist figures and a division within the community of faith, indicating the urgency of the times.

- **Antichrist(s):** Those who deny the nature of Christ, specifically that Jesus is the Christ and who deny the Father and the Son.
- **Abiding:** Remaining in the truth that was heard from the beginning, staying connected to Christ and the Father through the gospel message and the anointing.
- **Anointing:** Primarily understood by Dr. Yarbrough as the word of the gospel message, which conveys the Holy Spirit to believers and teaches and guides them.
- **Practicing Sin:** Engaging in a pattern of sin, particularly the kinds of sin John warns against (heresy, antinomianism, failure to love God), which indicates a lack of being born of God. Distinct from individual acts of sin which believers can confess and be forgiven for.
- **Lawlessness:** Sin is defined as lawlessness, indicating actions and attitudes that are contrary to God's commands and character.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The balanced life involves growth in faith (believing the gospel word), works (obeying God's commands), and relationship (a personal connection with God).
2. It is old because it is rooted in Old Testament teachings and the explicit commands of Jesus to love God and neighbor. It is new because it is made true "in Christ and in you" through the progress of redemption and the indwelling presence of Christ.
3. Dr. Yarbrough suggests that indifference or apathy towards a neighbor in need is also a form of "hating," because true love involves active engagement and care.
4. These terms represent representative stages of spiritual maturity or physical maturity (or both) among believers living out the message and grounded in necessary character traits.
5. The pre-command is "Do not love the world." Its significance is that setting one's ultimate affection on the world prevents the love of the Father from being in them, as love for God is expulsive of all rivals.
6. The three aspects are the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (vainglory of the material life).
7. "Bios" refers to one's daily, material life, including earning, spending, and consuming. The "pride of bios" is the vainglory derived from this earthly existence, which is temporary and lacks real meaning when treated as ultimate.

8. He immediately refers to the coming of the Antichrist and the fact that many Antichrists have already come, and people have left the community of faith.
9. Dr. Yarbrough believes the anointing is primarily the word of the gospel message, which conveys the Holy Spirit to believers, teaching and guiding them.
10. He interprets "practicing sin" as engaging in a continuous pattern of sin, particularly concerning core issues like denying Christ, hating brothers, or failing to love God, which signifies not being born of God. This is distinct from individual sins that believers commit but can confess and be forgiven for.

FAQs:

What is the central message of 1 John according to Dr. Yarbrough?

Dr. Yarbrough identifies the central burden of 1 John as focusing on God, His character, and His activity, summarized by the statement "God is light and in him there is absolutely no darkness." This emphasis on God's nature serves as the foundation for the epistle's message to walk in God's light and avoid darkness.

How does the "central commandment" discussed in 1 John relate to previous teachings?

The "central commandment" is to love one another. While it is presented as a "new commandment" in the sense that it is true in a new way because of Christ and the unfolding of redemption, John also emphasizes that it is an "old commandment" with roots in the Old Testament and the teachings and life of Jesus, particularly the command to love God and love your neighbor.

What is the significance of walking in the light and loving one's "brother" (fellow believer)?

Walking in the light is presented as synonymous with loving one's brother. To claim to be in the light while hating a fellow believer means one is still in darkness. This love is not passive; it involves active engagement and caring for the needs of others, contrasting sharply with apathy or indifference, which John considers a form of hate.

What does John's "pastoral appeal" reveal about believers and their spiritual journey?

John's pastoral appeal addresses believers at different stages of spiritual maturity ("little children," "fathers," and "young men"). He commends them for having their sins forgiven, knowing God, and overcoming the evil one. These characteristics are presented as necessary traits for embodying the message of love effectively and with integrity, highlighting the ongoing growth and grounding in Christ required for a balanced life in Him.

How does John connect loving the world with the love of the Father?

John strongly contrasts loving the world with the love of the Father. He warns believers not to love the world or the things in it, as such love is not from the Father. The "desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" are identified as being from the world and ultimately empty and passing away. True love for God is expulsive, pushing out rival affections for the world.

What is the "anointing" that John speaks of, and how does it relate to abiding?

While many commentators associate the "anointing" with the Holy Spirit, Dr. Yarbrough suggests it is primarily the word of the gospel, which is mediated by the Holy Spirit. This anointing abides in believers, teaches them, and is the means by which they have knowledge and are guided. The counsel is to remain in this anointing, which is crucial for abiding in the Son and the Father and receiving eternal life.

What are the consequences of denying Jesus is the Christ, according to John?

Denying that Jesus is the Christ is presented as a manifestation of the antichrist and a lie. It signifies a departure from the truth that abides and the apostolic message. Such a denial indicates a lack of relationship with both the Father and the Son, emphasizing the centrality of Christology to true belief.

How does abiding in Christ relate to sin, and what kind of sin does John warn against?

Abiding in Christ is connected to freedom from sin. John states that no one who abides in Him keeps on sinning, and that practicing righteousness is a mark of being born of Him. Dr. Yarbrough clarifies that John is likely warning against a fundamental turning away from God, true doctrine, and love, rather than occasional sins. This type of sin indicates a lack of a personal relationship with Christ and means one is not a child of God. While believers still sin, they are called to confess it and grow away from it, with Christ's appearance being for the purpose of taking away sins and destroying the works of the devil.