

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Balancing Life in Christ. Session 7, 1 John – Full Scale Faith. Section 4 [3:9-4:6] Central Warning; Section 5 [4:7-14] Foundational Imperative

This is Dr. Robert Yarbrough and his teaching on the Johannine epistles, Balancing Life in Christ. This is session 7, 1 John, Full Scale Faith. Section 4 [3:9-4:6] Central Warning. Section 5 [4:7-14] Foundational Imperative.

As we continue our study of 1 John, we move further into the middle of the book. And overall, we're talking about balancing life in Christ in the Johannine letters.

And as we saw in a previous lecture, this involves the work of the gospel word, bringing about faith, transforming behavior, and a personal relationship with God. So, faith works in love. This is the balanced Christian life.

And we grow in all those areas, and we can grow cold or go astray in all those areas. So, as John writes, especially in 1 John, he alternates between emphasizing matters of faith, like the doctrine of Christ, matters of works, like whether people are keeping commandments or not, and matters of love, whether people are devoted to loving God in a sense of loving their neighbor or not. And that often explains John's rhetoric.

He's emphasizing one or two of those three things. And whenever he talks about faith, he hasn't forgotten about commandments. When he talks about commandments, he hasn't forgotten about love.

And, you know, they're all three present whenever he mentions any one of them. In these two sections, sections four and five, we have first a central warning, and that's section four. And then we have a foundational imperative.

And so, let's move to the central warning. And the warning, beginning in chapter three, verse nine, is to beware of Cain's error and false prophets. We're going to see he begins with a summons to love.

And this sounds like he's just condemning something. But we'll see when he gets to the end of the passage, he's going to be commending love to his readers. And so, the goal of this is not just to talk something down, but the goal is to sketch a scenario before his readers' eyes, or his hearers, if it's being read to them, so that when it's over, the impression that will be left to them is, I don't want to be like that guy.

I want to be a person who reflects the love of God. So continuing a theme that he ended up in the last section on, no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him. And that could mean that God's seed, like the seed of the Word of God, could abide in a person.

Most people think that's what it is. But you can also translate that to refer to God's offspring. So, a child of God, children of God, abide in God.

So, the seed could refer to the Word, but the Greek word, in its wider use, also means descendants or offspring. So, either way, the Word of God abides in people, or God's people abide in God. You cannot keep on sinning because you've been born of God.

By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

In case we wondered earlier, what was the message that was from the beginning? Here, John, he flat out states it. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Don't be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. That would be referring to Christ, of course.

And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word, or talk, but in deed and truth. So, a few takeaways from those verses.

Under the heading of a summons to love, under the heading of a central warning. So, first, there has been a schism. Chapter 219, they went out from us, they were not of us.

I think that overall, we can infer that there were some hard feelings. There were some people that cut off relations with each other. Maybe some examples of people dissing each other, hating each other, disregarding each other.

And I think in the wake of the schism, he's told people you should abide in Christ, and not follow those who've left. In the wake of that dislocation and that departure, you can tell who's who. Identifying those born of God is possible.

The people who've gone out have not abided, they're not practicing righteousness, they're not loving their brother, they've cut themselves off from the apostolic fellowship. And you can tell who's who. So, that's the first thing he says here, under this idea of a summons to love.

You don't have to scratch your head and wonder, should I follow those who have exhibited hatefulness in their departure from the apostolic community? Secondly, we heard earlier in 1:5 that God is light. That's one of the great themes of the book. The flip side of that is love one another.

Don't separate from them. Verses 11 and 12. This is the message you've heard.

Don't be like Cain. God is light, and God is love; we're going to see later on. And so, we should not be like Cain.

We should not be separating from each other in the church. Then, through the rest of this section, basically, we're reminded that love is not just a noun. It's not an abstract concept for John.

It's an activity. It's an action. It's the direct result of a relationship.

If you have a relationship with a person, or, I've observed, even a relationship with a dog. A good dog and a kid who has a good dog, they're like buddies. That kid is in a relationship with the dog.

It can be a sweet and beautiful thing to see. This is love. This is love where there's a relationship between creatures.

They're aware of each other, and they live in connection with each other. It's possible in the Christian community to define love in terms of a concept. You can define it in terms of things that Jesus did.

This is love. He died for my sins. It can be a very true thing, but a very sterile thing.

But for John, love is a verb. This love that shows itself in an awareness of other people and their needs, that's a primary marker of being a child of God. It's also an assurance that you possess eternal life.

If you feel a compulsion to show concern for other people, that's a good sign. It can be a bothersome sign because you might say, oh, I wish I had a harder heart so that I

wouldn't be troubled by other people's needs. But then in your right mind, you realize, well, this is a good thing that I'm troubled by other people's needs because it's a sign that God has addressed my needs, and God is real to me, and I want to address other people's needs because that's who God is to me.

He's a God who shows love, and he's a God who enables me to participate in his love with other people. So that was a bit about the summons to love. Don't be like Cain.

Love your neighbor. Love each other. Then we have a confirmation of love.

By this, we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. These words beg to be interpreted in the context of people who've been destabilized because there's been a rift in the church. I don't know if you've ever been a part of the separation of a Christian community, but it causes a lot of anguish, a lot of uncertainty sometimes, a lot of instability.

And John is trying to stabilize people who've just gone through something that is kind of traumatic for them. Reassure our heart before him, verse 20. For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whenever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he 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. So, a few observations about those verses.

First of all, assurance lies in God's character, and not our self-confidence. We all know the proverb, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

That kind of foundation is what John is speaking from here. Here's how we know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts. When our hearts condemn us, God is greater, and he knows everything.

So, the schism may have destabilized us, but God is greater than the schism. And so we have an assurance that's beyond our own ability to assure ourselves. It's very important when calamity happens, because, you know, we're creatures.

And things happen that are bigger than we are, and they grip us, and we're helpless. It can happen when someone dies, if you've ever had grief. No matter how firm your

assurance of salvation is, somebody close to you can die, and it can be so unexpected that you find yourself unable to sleep, maybe unable to eat.

You find yourself in an altered state, and you just have to ride it out. It's going to take some hours or some days. The other day, when we had a big storm, and I got back to my house, and there was a tree on my house, and there were trees everywhere, and the road was blocked, and it was like a bomb had gone off.

You know, we call this shock. You know, you're looking at things, and you can't process it. And in those moments, all you can say, if you believe in God is, if you know Christ, you just say, God has command of this, and I don't understand it, but He's good, and I'm going to trust Him.

And in these hours, when my wife and I were trying to process this destruction that happened, my wife said to me, she said, well, you know, all you can say is, the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. And I said, yes. I said, and what does it say next? And she said,, Blessed be the name of the Lord.

So God knows all things, and God is greater than the instability of our little individual hearts. You know, one person among eight billion on the earth right now, and under, you know, among the hundreds of billions that have been alive to God through the centuries, God is so great that He can give us a stability that transcends our own finitude and our own smallness. That's where assurance lies.

It lies in God. We see in verse 23 that faith, obedience, and love are the hallmarks of gospel reception. This relates back to the chart I showed in an earlier lecture, that we have faith, we have believing, we have commandments or works or obedience, and we have love.

And notice they're all three in verse 23. This is His commandment that we believe and love. That's what the balanced Christian life consists of.

And now we have, I think, for the first time in John's letter, the introduction of someone that he knows has been present the whole time, because John wrote a gospel. And in that gospel, Jesus, while he was still on earth, promised to send the Spirit. And John was, he heard that, and then John received the Spirit's coming.

So, he's known about the Holy Spirit now probably for 50 years as he writes this. But in this verse, for the first time, he mentions the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit works assurance.

In conjunction with God and the Son of God, and in conjunction with our responsiveness to Him, our belief, our obedience, our love. As we respond to God, we get the assurance that He abides in us. And that can also be translated among us.

It's not just an individual thing, it's a community thing. The people of God, a husband, wife, and marriage, co-workers in the gospel. It's not that Jesus is present with us individually, but He binds us together by a corporate presence, and John refers to that here.

Next, we have a summons to choose. In this larger section, he's talking about, you know, it's a warning. And we have agency with respect to this warning.

We can choose to be a certain way. He says, Beloved, don't believe every spirit. But test the spirits to see whether they're from God.

For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming. And now it's in the world already.

There's a lot that could be said about these verses. But one of the things we can say in a book that talks about love so much is that love does not mean naive gullibility. Love doesn't mean just whatever I affirm, whatever I feel warm about, whatever I feel good about, whatever I love; that's love.

Love is love. The love that John has in mind here is discerning. It tests the spirits, the voices, the influencers that are around us and that may want to affect us.

So, love is not just a sentiment or a feeling. It can be tested. Secondly, convictions about Jesus Christ reveal whether or not claims or ideas are true.

I've already said that a central idea in 1 John is that God is light. But one reason that John speaks of God who is invisible, later on he's going to say no one has seen God at any time, and he has said that in John chapter 1. One of the reasons he can talk in terms of God's visibility when he's invisible is because Christ has come. Christ has manifested God to us.

And this means that what you think about Christ defines what you think about God. If you think that Christ is a created being and not the second person of the Trinity, divine, and one with the Father in all eternity, then your definition of God is different than if you think Jesus is the Son of God who manifested God in this world with all the fullness that's possible for divinity to manifest in him. Christ is the Son of God who manifested God in the human form.

So, this is a reason why John stresses the person of Christ so much and the work of Christ so much, because he's zealous for God, who is light. And if you get Jesus

wrong, you don't get God right. You may have a Jesus that's actually leading you into darkness.

It's not the real Jesus. And he defines this here as the Jesus who has come in the flesh. And if you want to know what that means more fully, read John's gospel.

John's gospel is a long transcript of things that Jesus said and things that Jesus did that even though it says in John 1 18, no one has ever seen God, that is God the Father, the God who says is light, no one has seen that God, but the one and only Son or the only begotten Son of God, he has explained him. He's lived out a life on earth that gives visibility to the invisible, transcendent God. So, you need to choose.

You need to discriminate. There's a spirit of the Antichrist. There's a spirit of the people who have apparently left the church.

There's a spirit of the people that don't confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh. And you need to decide who God is and who you think Christ is. And of course, I think he's writing to people who made the right decision at the beginning.

And he's saying, abide in the decision that you made that this is who Jesus really is. In our modern world, every decade or two, there will be a new movement that decides that Jesus isn't who the church has confessed him to be. Back in the 60s and 70s, there was a movement called the myth of God incarnate, the myth of God incarnate.

And these were scholars in the UK and scholars in North America. And they were writing books and articles talking about how, actually, this idea of God coming in Jesus, that was an ancient myth. And we shouldn't believe that.

And then, some years later, there was something called the Jesus Seminar. And the Jesus Seminar people didn't think that Jesus was the son of God. And in fact, they voted on the sayings of Jesus in the gospels.

They used different colored beads. And there was a group of 70 or 80 scholars. And they would vote, did Jesus say this? And did Jesus say that? And in the Lord's Prayer, they knew for sure that he said, our father.

But no other words were sure in the Lord's Prayer. So, there are spirits out there all the time, perennially. And a lot of times, we see them around Easter on CNN or something, because that's a good time to publicize something shocking to get people to watch the media.

Some new theory about Christ. And John is just saying, Abide in what we have seen. John, Peter, James, and others are the apostolic witnesses to the incarnation of the Son of God.

If you choose, here's your confirmation. As you choose, here's your confirmation. Little children, you're from God, and you've overcome them.

That is, those spirits, the schismatic faction in the church. You've overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world. Therefore, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

We are from God, that is, the apostolic we, and believers who affirm the apostolic message. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

By this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Takeaway number one, steadfastness lies in he who is with us and among us. Verse four, you're from God, you've overcome them.

He who is in you and among you is greater than the one in the world. That's where our steadfastness lies. As people come and go, movements come and go, claims come and go, God remains steadfast.

Secondly, church division occurs when the world gets the upper hand over the word. The word is the scripture. Verse five talks about people from the world who speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

And it's clear he's making a connection here between the world and those who have left the Johannine church in 219, they went out from us. He's been warning about that faction ever since that verse. The church has a very complex task because our God so loved the world.

And we have a mission in the world, and we live in the world. And we want to connect with the world. We want to better the world.

We want to care for the poor in the world. We want to have hospitals in the world. There are a lot of things we want to do, and it's all in the world.

But there's a world as sort of an idolatrous construct. There's world as the rival to God. There's a world that wants to say there is no God.

We are the authority. We ourselves. We're building a smarter planet for ourselves, by ourselves, and we don't need any transcendent help.

And John is saying, this is what, this is how churches are destroyed, is when they quit listening to God as the authority, and the world then becomes their authority. And they have to champion the things that the world tells them they should champion if

they really want to be acceptable to the world. A third takeaway is that the apostolic message and teaching come from God.

And it is the test of spirits. By spirits, I would mean ideas, claims, teachings, as well as the people who advocate them, and the actual spirits, the unclean spirits, the spirits that are not holy, but the spirits that are the underlings and the messengers and the servants of the devil. When you read the Bible overall, you see that there are spiritual powers.

In the world, there are angels who are good. There are angels who are not good. There's God, who is perfect.

There's Satan, who is against God. And the result of all this is that we have conflicting spirits in the world. We have good things, and we have dark, bad, and destructive things.

John says, we, that is, we apostles, we're from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God has not listened to us.

By this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. This is why we study our Bibles. This is why we hear a sermon at least probably once a week in church if we're church-going Christians.

We continually need sharpening and refining and reminding about what God says and who God is, so that we know what's true and we know what we need to stay away from or we need to counteract or we need to displace. So that is section four, the central warning. Beware of Cain's error.

Beware the false prophets. Get some discernment. Choose a relationship with God that includes faith and God's commands, and then we'll have the steadfastness that God gives, and we'll grow in our understanding of our benefit from the apostolic message and our life in the apostolic community.

We have another section we want to cover quickly, and I call this the foundational imperative, and that imperative is God's love. Now, this doesn't take away from the need to believe. It doesn't take away from the importance of the true doctrine of Christ.

It doesn't take away from the relevance of commands. But he's just focusing now on loving God. And here's the first exhortation of two to love.

Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

In this, or could translate it by this, the love of God has been made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. And that word live there is from the word zoe, life. The verb is zao, but it's not the word that we saw earlier, bios, which means every day, work a day, make a living.

This is the dynamic of life that God gives. It's the vitality of a living body as opposed to a dead body. We have life, and through Christ, we have eternal life.

We might live through him. In this is love, not that we've loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. We can draw out three inferences from this.

First, in verse seven, to know God is to exude and exercise love. If you exude something, you glow with it. It comes out of you.

Again, verse seven, let us love one another for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. If you know God, then love is one of the markers of that. I think he says that in part because he's had people leave.

They showed their lovelessness, and he's reassuring the people who've remained what it means to know God. It means to get along with each other, bear with each other, not cut each other off or separate from each other. Secondly, that God is love does not mean that love is God.

And it just needs to be said that God is a person. God is not an attribute. He's not an abstract idea.

When John says God is love, he means that God's love is so powerful and God's love is so prominent in his self-disclosure in Christ. That we can equate God and love in some respects, though not in all respects. So, he's just using, you could say, hyperbole to magnify the love of God and the greatness of the love of God.

He's already said back in 3:1, behold what manner of love it is that the Father has given unto us. It's such a magnificent thing that God has taken on flesh and died for our sins, and gives us the hope of eternal life. So, God is love.

But love is an attribute of God. Love is not a substitute for God. And the glorious thing about it is it's an attribute of God that he can share with creatures.

Some attributes of God, we say, are incommunicable. He can't communicate his omniscience. He knows everything.

I will never know everything. He is everywhere at once. He's omnipresent.

I can only be who I am. And there are a lot of other omnis about God, things that are all true and perfectly true about God that are not true about any human. But God's love is an attribute that he can share with his people, and he does do that.

So, it's a very wonderful thing. But we don't want to fall into the trap of thinking that, well, if somebody is expressing love, that's God. We can express love without knowing God because we're made in God's image, and human beings have a capacity to care and to show regard for others.

So, just like dogs and cats can love, they love their owners; people might get into an argument about whether dogs or cats love better. If you have a cat, you think your cat is the best friend of people. I won't go into that here.

But since even animals can love, certainly people can love. They're made in God's image. But then there's this other kind of love that is possible through receiving the love of God that was shown in Christ, and that's what John's talking about here.

The measure of love, number three, is not human feeling but divine action in Christ, and especially the atonement. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us, defined as sending his son to be the propitiation for our sins. I always use this message when I perform, or this verse when I perform a marriage, because it's important for people who are getting married to understand that there's a greater love than human love.

And if you want a perfect love in your marriage, then you need the love that God showed in sending his son to sacrifice for others. That's the measure of love. It's not a human feeling.

It's divine action in Christ, and especially his taking the sins of others. There's a second exhortation to love here. And then we'll be done with this section.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, that is, God the Father, in his transcendent glory. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his son to be the savior of the world. A few quick takeaways.

Number one, God's love catalyzes ours. You know what a catalyst is. It's something that you add to something that causes it to be stirred up or to be active.

If God loved us, we ought to love one another. We ought to move from what God has done for us to how we regard each other. And God is present with us to encourage that.

And God's commandments also push us in that direction. Secondly, God's love is shown and perfected. And by that, it means to complete its intended effect.

God abides in us, and his love is perfected. It doesn't mean that we're perfect or that we love with all the perfection God does. But it means God's love goes forth to do something, to have an effect.

And it's perfected when believers love each other. I heard a saying some years ago that has always stuck with me, and I find it's very handy in this connection. Never underestimate the power of small gestures.

And when we're living in a Christian community, sometimes we see some little thing or we think of some little thing. We could send an email. We could send a card.

We could say a word to somebody. But we think, well, that's not really going to solve anything. Why bother? But a lot of times it's the little gestures that are expressive of love.

God knows that's all you have time for. And that's all that's appropriate for you. But it matters a lot to another person if somebody shows just a small recognition of them.

We don't know sometimes how lonely people might be. Recently, I met somebody who sat with somebody in church. And the people they sat with were deeply moved because they always sit in the same place, and they always sit kind of by themselves.

And the idea that somebody would come and sit with them just made them feel. They were elderly. And you get elderly sometimes.

You know, your kids are far away, and your friends are dying, and your family's dying. And for somebody who's younger to come and sit with you and like show care for you, this was very, very meaningful to them. So love, God's love, is great and lofty and transcendent as it is, as shown in Christ.

It's revealed and perfected when we love each other. That's a big thing when we love each other. And of course, when we don't, it's a big thing.

Thirdly, a response to the spirit so as to love is an assurance of abiding in God and vice versa. If you want to be more secure in the sense that God is with you, then take care in the days ahead to make a list and pray for people in situations. And if there

are ways that you can tangibly reach out and involve yourself in caring for people, then do that.

And it says, by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit. By this we know, it has to do with loving one another as God has loved us. Finally, John testifies to the assurance that he offers to his readers.

John says, we have seen, which includes his listeners or readers, but it especially applies to those, if you go back to the early verses of 1 John, he talks about what we've seen, what we've heard, what we've touched, what we've handled. That's the witness to Jesus' earthly life. We have seen and testified that the Father sent his son to be the Savior of the world.

And John ends this section by testifying to the assurance that he offers to his readers that he has received from God. And that's the end of the fifth section of 1 John.

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